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CHRIST AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

JOHN McILVEEN, BA. DD.

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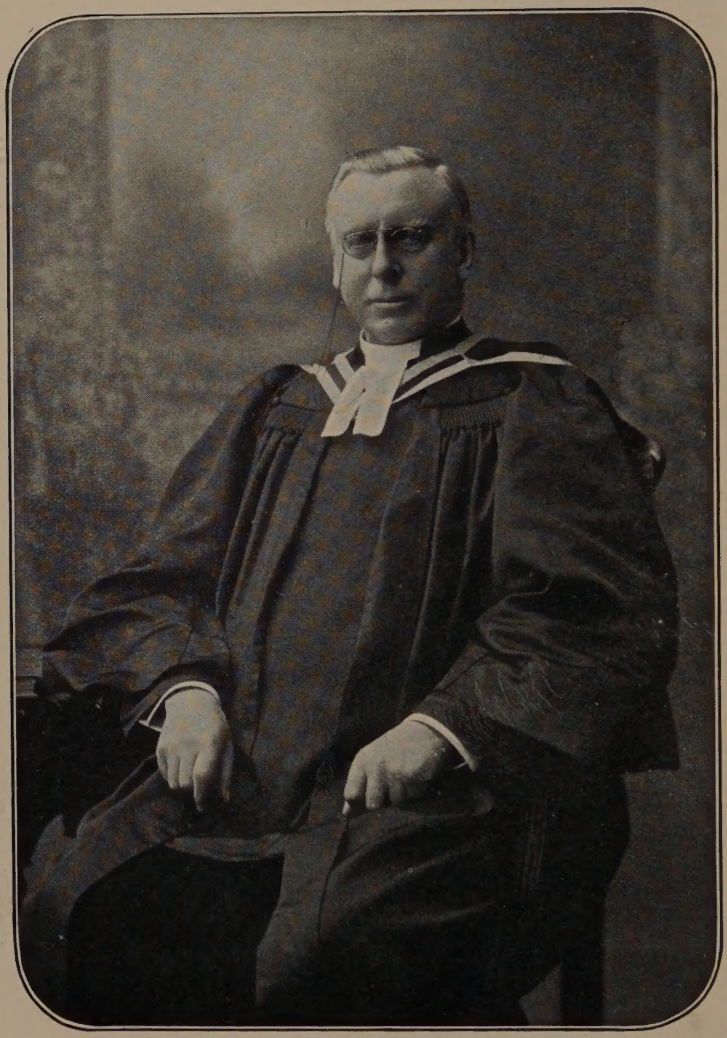

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CHRIST
AND
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

BY
The Rev. JOHN McILVEEN, B.A., D.D.
AUTHOR OF "THE CHURCH'S WORSHIP"

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PREFACE

THIS book is composed of a number of discourses, selected from those of a ministry extending over forty years. Written at various dates, often far apart, they are brought together here because they all relate to the theme indicated by the title of the volume.

The Author has reason to believe that they were spiritually helpful to many of those to whom they were addressed; and they are now sent forth in the hope that they may prove the means of glorifying Christ in the spiritual upbuilding of those who read them.

It has been thought well to modify as little as possible the precise form of address in which the discourses were delivered.

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I

CHRIST'S THREE APPEARINGS

" Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true ; but *into heaven itself, now to* APPEAR *in the presence of God for us.* Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others ; for then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world : but now once in the end of the world *hath He* APPEARED *to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.* And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment : so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall *He* APPEAR *the second time without sin unto salvation* " (Heb. ix. 24-28).

" Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true ; but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us : nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place year by year with blood not his own ; else must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world : but now once at the end of the ages hath He been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment : so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for Him, unto salvation " (Heb. ix. 24-28, R.V.).

CHRIST'S THREE APPEARINGS

HEBREWS IX. 24-28

IN this passage of Holy Scripture we have mention made of three different "appearings" of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. In verse 26, we have His appearing here in the world when He was born of the Virgin, His object in thus coming being to atone for the world's sin—"Now once in the end of the world hath He *appeared* to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." In verse 24, we have His appearing in heaven, where, at the present time, He is interceding for those who have fled to Him for refuge—"Christ is entered into heaven itself, now to *appear* in the presence of God for us." And in verse 28, we have His second appearing here in the world, when He will come in His glory with all the holy angels—"Unto them that look for Him shall He *appear* the second time without sin unto salvation."

In these three appearings we have a complete view of the work which Christ has undertaken for the salvation of His people. In the first, He is presented to us as our Priest atoning for our sin; in the second, as

our Priest interceding on our behalf; and in the third, as our King leading to victory.

We shall briefly consider these in the order in which we have now mentioned them.

I

His First Appearing in the World

"Now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." As I have said, He is here presented as a Priest offering a sacrifice.

(1) Now when we think of Christ as a Priest, the first question which we have to ask is, *What was the sacrifice which He offered?* And to that the answer is clear and distinct. It was "Himself." "Now once in the end of the ages hath He appeared to put away sin *by the sacrifice of Himself.*"

He offered Himself. And when we call to mind that fact we, of course, think of Him as suffering, as shedding His blood, and especially as dying. But these are things which could only pertain to His human nature. As God He could not die. It was in His body and soul He suffered, and it was as regards His humanity He died on the cross. If, therefore, we ask what the sacrifice was which He laid on the altar, we must reply, It was His humanity. It was specially that He might offer this sacrifice that He became man; that

he was made of a woman, and thus made under that law under which the human race was placed. The Incarnation was in order to the Atonement.

This is a truth brought before us in various parts of Holy Scripture. Thus in Hebrews x. 10 it is said, "We are sanctified *through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ* once for all." And in this same passage it is expressly stated that God prepared Him this body that He might offer it. "Sacrifice and offering [according to the Ceremonial law of Moses] Thou wouldest not, but *a body hast Thou prepared me*"—That He might offer it (Heb. x. 5-9). And in harmony with this is the language of the Apostle Peter, "Who His own self bare our sins *in His own body* on the tree" (1 Pet. ii. 24). "Body" in both these passages, I take it, stands for His human nature in its entirety, for we know He suffered in His soul as well as in His body. "It pleased the Lord to . . . make His soul an offering for sin" (Is. liii. 10).

The offering, then, which Jesus laid on the altar was, as the Catechism expresses it, "a true body and a reasonable soul."

(2) But in order to a sacrifice, there must be an altar; and so our second question must be, *What was the altar on which the humanity of Christ was laid?* Christ Himself, in one of His discourses, laid down a principle which, I think, may guide us here. He said

it was the altar which sanctified the gift (Matt. xxiii. 19). The lamb to be offered in sacrifice was in nothing different from other members of the flock until it was laid on the altar. It was the altar which made it sacred and separated it from all other lambs. Now, if we are guided by this principle, we shall have no difficulty in deciding what was the altar on which Jesus laid the sacrifice of His humanity. It was His Divinity. It was His Divine nature which gave value and efficacy to His human nature—His humanity was a real humanity, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; but it was joined to a Divine personality. And hence the blood shed on the cross is designated the blood of God (Acts xx. 28), and He who was crucified is called "the Lord of glory" (1 Cor. ii. 8).

(3) Then in the next place, for the sake of clearness, we ought to ask, *Who was the Priest who offered the sacrifice?* And the answer is, He was Christ Himself. "*He* appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." He offered Himself. He thus supplied in Himself not only the sacrifice and the altar, but also the officiating Priest. In other words His death was a voluntary act. "No man taketh My life from Me," He said, "but I lay it down of myself" (John x. 18). And it was necessary that it should be voluntary else His death had not been a sacrifice. Every believer, therefore, can say, in the language of the Apostle Paul, "He loved me and gave Himself for me."

(4) Our last question is, *To whom was the sacrifice offered?* It was offered, we are here told, "to put away sin"—to put it away by making atonement for it. It must, therefore, have been offered to Him against whom the sin had been committed, viz., God. But this is not merely a matter of inference. It is distinctly stated in the 14th verse of this chapter: "Christ, through the Eternal Spirit, *offered Himself without spot to God.*"

God's justice had been offended and had to be satisfied. God loved us and desired our salvation and as the claims of eternal justice could not be set aside, He prepared for His co-eternal Son "a body" that in it He might render full satisfaction.

And now, all this has been accomplished. Jesus has appeared here in the world. He has actually put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. The Divine justice has been satisfied. God can now be just and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus. And it only remains that we shall lay our hand on the head of the Sacrifice—that we shall stretch forth the hand of faith and touch Christ, thereby identifying ourselves with Him, and the putting away of sin will then be true for us. Its guilt will be put away at once, and its presence put away more and more through the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in our nature.

II

His Appearing in Heaven

"Christ is entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." He is at this moment in the presence of God. He is there performing the second part of His great priestly function—interceding on our behalf.

There is not, I think, for us as Christians any more important or comforting statement than that contained in Hebrews vii. 25: "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." He died, but behold, He is alive again for evermore and is actively engaged on our behalf. He is carrying forward the work of His people's salvation.

Let us pause to meditate on this great truth. What exactly is He doing? How does He intercede?

(1) Well, first of all, according to the language of our text, *He just appears*. He has gone into heaven, "now to appear in the presence of God for us." He is there as the Apostle John saw Him in one of his visions—"A Lamb as it had been slain." He is there in His glorified humanity, with pierced hands and wounded side.

God's covenant with Israel of old was, "When I see the blood I will pass over you." And so, I fancy I hear God saying to us, "When I see Christ in your

nature, standing in My presence as your representative, with all the marks of His suffering upon Him, I must pass over you. I must pass over and bless you."

We read in ancient history of a certain Grecian who, having broken the laws of his country, was condemned to die. But he had a distinguished brother who was granted the privilege of interceding for the condemned one's life. When the time came for him to present his petition every one expected to hear a most eloquent appeal. But to the surprise of all he uttered not a word. He simply held up to the court the stump of the arm he had lost when fighting in defence of his country. It was enough. It was more eloquent than words, and his brother's pardon was granted. We have in heaven an Elder Brother, He is there to plead for us, but no words are needed.

Five bleeding wounds He bears, received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers; they strongly speak for me.
Forgive him, oh, forgive! they cry,
Nor let that ransomed sinner die.

(2) His presence in heaven, in our nature and on our behalf, is as a constant incense ascending to God with all our worship and service. This is most beautifully pictured in one of the visions of the Apostle John. "Another angel (who is no other than the great Angel of the Covenant, Jesus Christ Himself) came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was

given unto Him much incense that He should offer it *with the prayers of all the saints* upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense which *came with the prayers of the saints*, ascended up before God out of the Angel's hand " (Rev. viii. 3-4). And so the Apostle Peter says, " Ye are a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, *acceptable to God by Jesus Christ* " (1 Pet. ii. 5).

(3) He is in heaven *to answer every charge which can be made against those whom He represents*. It is thus the Apostle Paul speaks in his Epistle to the Romans. " Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect ? " Their unworthiness may be great, their sins may be many, but God will assuredly justify them so long as there is in His presence His own beloved Son who says, " I bore their sins in My own body on the tree." " Who is he that shall condemn them " ? God will not so long as Christ is there to say, " I died for them." The answer to every charge which can be preferred is " It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us " (Rom. viii. 34).

What a comforting truth, then, we have in the fact of Christ's all prevalent intercession in heaven ! We cannot think too much about the work He accomplished for us on earth ; but I am sure we think too little about what He is now doing for us in heaven.

What power might be ours in the court above, did we ask more in His name and expect more through His intercession!

III

AND now we come to consider HIS SECOND APPEARING HERE IN THE WORLD. "Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." The subject is a large one, on which I cannot at present speak at length. Moreover, we must acknowledge that, as to its details, there must of necessity be much obscurity owing to the fact that the event is yet in the future. There are, however, a few points which, I think, are quite clear and to which we may briefly refer.

(1) *His second Coming does not mean the believer's death.* That is our going to Him, not His coming to us. Not only so, death is, even to the believer, a thing of gloom, a thing which he would gladly escape; whereas the second coming is always presented as being to the believer a thing of brightness and hope. It is "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (Tit. ii. 13).

(2) *It will be a coming to earth in visible form.* He shall appear "the second time." His first appearing was here in the world; and it is natural to expect that that which is described as His second appearing should also be on earth. In fact the meaning of the language

is that it will be the second on earth. In harmony with this is the assurance of the angels to the disciples as they stood gazing up into heaven, on the occasion of His ascension: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts i. 11).

(3) *It will be sudden, and to most people unexpected, and therefore premillenial.* "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thes. iv. 16, 17). This will be a sudden event. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. xv. 51).

The time of this event is by us unknown. "Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. xxiv. 36). It is evidently kept concealed for a wise and beneficent purpose. In fact the purpose has been clearly revealed. It is that the Church may be kept in the attitude of constant watchfulness. "Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is" (Mark xiii.

33). "Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark xiii. 35-37).

And this being so, it cannot be postmillenial. If we were assured that a thousand years of universal righteousness must precede His Coming, the time of it could not, in any proper sense, be said to be unknown. Besides, the injunction to be always watching for His advent could, for so far in the history of the Church, have had little force. It could have no force for us, for we should know assuredly that it would not be in our time.

(4) *It will be to complete the salvation of His people.* "Unto them that look for Him shall he appear the second time *wthout sin unto salvation.*"

The first time He came into the world, He came burdened with sin. "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." And so He was here as a servant, in all lowliness, to suffer and to die. But not so will it be when He comes the second time. He will come not to suffer for sin, but to show forth the fruit of His sufferings in the completed salvation of His people—salvation completed as to both soul and body—He will come to exhibit them in their glory and beauty as they swell the triumph of His train.

He will come to take them up to receive their crowns and to be associated with Him in judging the world. "For know ye not," says the Apostle Paul, "that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor. vi. 2).

Jesus is coming. We know not how soon He may appear. It may be any day. Are we ready to meet Him? *A great separation will take place when He comes.* Some will be taken up to be for ever with Him, and to escape the judgment coming upon the world; but others will be left behind to pass through the fires of the great tribulation. "Two women shall be grinding at the mill: the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two shall be in the field: the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Matt. xxiv. 40).

If He were to come to-day, would you be taken or left? Test yourself by asking, "Am I looking for Him?" It is unto them that are "looking for Him" that He will appear without sin unto salvation. Are you longing for His appearing and hoping that it may be in your time? If you were assured that He would come to-day, would it make you glad, or would it fill you with consternation?

How blessed to be able to say with the Apostle Paul, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also *who have loved His appearing*"!

II

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

" The preaching of the Cross is to them that perish foolishness ; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God " (1 Cor. i. 18).

" The word of the Cross is to them that are perishing foolishness ; but unto us who are being saved it is the power of God " (1 Cor. i. 18, R.V.).

THE WORD OF THE CROSS

1 Cor. i. 18

For "the *preaching* of the Cross," in the Authorised Version, we have in the Revised Version, "the *word* of the Cross." An eminent commentator renders it, "the *doctrine* of the Cross," and a distinguished preacher speaks of it as "the eloquence of the Cross." The idea seems to be that the Cross preaches. It has for us a word or message. And so the question we have at present to consider is, What does the Cross preach? What is the message it brings?

First of all, however, let us understand what is meant by the cross. There are crosses which are not "the cross." There was once the "wooden" cross on which the Son of God was put to death outside the City of Jerusalem. I say there "once was"; though Romanists tell us that they still have pieces of it in their churches at Rome, Paris, Palestine and many other places—as much of it as would build a ship! And men perform long journeys to gaze upon one of these relics. But if one of these were a piece of the

real wood on which Jesus died, what good could it do a man to look at it? The whole of it could not save a soul. There would be no more virtue in it than in the wood of any tree of the forest.

Then, there is the "ornamental" cross which may be seen on churches, and books, and banners; or which you may see hanging from the neck of a lady of fashion.

And there is what may be called the "historical" cross, the cross of which you read in history. You read that Jesus, who claimed to be the Messiah, was nailed to a cross and after six hours there, died, and His body being taken down, was laid in a tomb. You know this as a matter of history, just as you know that William III. revolutionised these kingdoms more than two hundred years ago; and as you know that Columbus discovered America.

But none of these is what is meant by "the cross" of our text. And to attach spiritual value to any of these is a miserable delusion.

What, then, do we mean by "the cross"? It is a figurative expression for the fact that more than eighteen hundred years ago the Incarnate Son of God died on a cross as an atonement for the world's sin. It means that He bore our sins in His own body on the tree.

What does the cross preach? Suppose we take

our stand, in imagination, by the side of Christian in Bunyan's great allegory, and try to understand the message of the Cross as the immortal dreamer describes it. The pilgrim "had a great burden on his back"; which is Bunyan's way of saying, he was keenly conscious of his guilt and realised his consequent danger. From this burden he could get no ease, and his bitter cry was, "This burden will sink me lower than the grave and I shall fall into Tophet." It was this burden which sank him in the slough of Despond; and it was seeking relief from it which led him to betake himself to Legality's house where Mount Sinai, all on fire, was like to fall on him and destroy him. And how did he at last find deliverance? He came up the hill to a cross; gazed upon it; thought of the One who there had died; realised that it was for his sins that the Holy One had yielded up His life. As he beheld all this, "the burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back," and rolling down the hill into an empty grave, he felt it no more. At that moment Three Shining Ones, saluted him with, "Peace be unto Thee." The first said, "Thy sins are forgiven thee"; the second stripped him of his rags and clothed him with change of raiment; and the third set a mark on his forehead and gave him a sealed roll to carry in his bosom. The first Shining One is God the Father, whose prerogative it is to pardon all

who trust in the Christ who died: the second is God the Son, who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and whose righteousness is unto all and upon all them who believe in Him; and the third is God the Holy Ghost, who graciously works in our nature, changing our outward life, represented by the mark on the forehead; and giving us His secret testimony in our hearts that we are the children of God, represented by the sealed roll in the bosom. "Then," says Bunyan, "Christian gave three leaps and went on singing."

Thus Bunyan describes the "word" of the Cross, and its power to save the soul. The only difficulty which may occur to some is that the deliverance from the burden of sin is represented as taking place some time after the "wicket gate" has been entered and Interpreter's house has been passed. The wicket gate is another name for the gate of regeneration, the strait gate, the beginning of the new life. And the Interpreter's house stands for the Christian instruction which the young convert needs and receives, after he has entered into the narrow way. And is it not a fact that forgiveness is the very first blessing which the sinner receives when he believes on Christ? Yes: it is the first received, but it is not always the first realised.

No doubt many do realise their forgiveness at the

very beginning of the Christian life; and as a consequence they at once enter into great peace and joy. The jailor of Philippi, on the very night of his conversion, "rejoiced greatly." The Ethiopian eunuch, immediately on his baptism, "went on his way rejoicing." And the converts of the day of Pentecost immediately entered into a life of joy, "eating their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." But this is not the universal experience. Very often it is only after the young believer has become more fully instructed in Divine things, and obtained a clearer vision of the glory of Christ's redemptive work, that he comes to realise how many and great are his privileges, and that among these is the full forgiveness of all his sins the moment he believed in Jesus Christ. And it is only when this truth is clearly apprehended, that the life of joy begins. It is only then that, as Bunyan describes it, the Christian "gives three leaps for joy and goes on his way singing."

(1) *The cross preaches the terrible evil of sin.* Sin is obnoxious to God's holiness and justice. His justice cannot endure it. And though it be His own beloved Son who becomes responsible for it He must inflict on Him the penalty it merits. Some seem to think that God, being kind and merciful, will overlook their sins and at last receive them into His holy heaven. But this He could not do. It were to set aside eternal

justice, which is an essential attribute of His nature. And think you, if He could have allowed sin to go unpunished, He would have required His co-eternal Son to humble Himself and become obedient unto death, even the accursed death of the Cross. Sin can only be put away by being expiated. And when this truth is clearly seen, sin becomes a burden on heart and conscience too heavy to be borne, and the sinner cannot but cry out, "What must I do to be saved."

(2) *The Cross preaches the great love of God for the sinner.* God hates sin; but loves the sinner. He desires not the death of the sinner; but "willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth."

God loves. "God *is* love." "God loves *you*, O sinner! How much does He love you? Look at the Cross and see. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life." God loved the world! And what sort of a world was it He loved? A wicked world: a world in rebellion against Him: a world that crucified His own Son when He appeared in it. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8).

To comprehend, in any adequate manner, the love manifested in the Cross, it is necessary to ponder

earnestly the thought as to who He is that there dies. It is Christ that dies. And who is He? He is God. It is in His human nature He suffers and dies; but He is a Divine Person. He is the very Being who created the Universe, "without whom was nothing made that was made." That babe who lay in the manger of the stable, is He God? Yes: He is God in condescension, in humiliation—God robed in the lowly garment of flesh and blood. He who was reviled, spit upon, buffeted, scourged, is He God? Yes; He is God in the sinner's place, whom all angels worship. And He who sweats those great drops of blood in Gethsemane; who stands as a prisoner before those Roman rulers; who is thrown down upon the ground by the rough hands of those Roman soldiers, and nailed with spikes to that cruel cross; who hangs there in the sight of men and angels and demons, groaning, dying: is He God? Yes; He thinks it not robbery to be equal with God. And this Being does all this for sinners, for sinners like you and me! Did the mind of angels, in its loftiest flights, ever conceive such love as this? This is the love of God. The breadth and length and depth and height of it passeth knowledge.

Only let this love be apprehended by the sinner, and his heart is won; his nature is changed: he is born of God.

(3) *The Cross preaches that God's justice has been fully satisfied.* What is Jesus doing on that cross? Suffering for the sin of the world: suffering as the Just One for the unjust. And why? God is just and must inflict the penalty of His violated law, and Jesus is bearing that penalty. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."

Only let this be clearly perceived, and it can be easily seen how the cross is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." It has accomplished the impossible. There is in it a power to put away sin from God's presence; to put it away as a burden from the guilty conscience; and to put it away as a pollution from the sinner's heart.

We gaze upon the cross. We hear Him say, "It is finished." Yes; the debt is paid; the atonement is made; and we have "peace with God." "I exhort you to make your peace with God," were the words addressed to a poor bricklayer, who had fallen from a great height, and was lying fatally injured. "Make my peace with God!" he exclaimed. "Why, that was made eighteen hundred years ago, when my great and glorious Lord paid all my debt upon the cruel tree. Christ is my peace, and I am saved."

What is the Cross of Christ to you? "O," you say, "I have been converted." But conversion is not everything. As one has said, "It is only the *beginning* of everything." It is possible, through the vision of the Cross, to have been converted, and not to be, day by day, living under its power. It is the power of God "unto salvation"; and salvation is not an act but a process. This is clearly indicated in the language of our text (R.V.): "Unto us who are *being saved* it is the power of God." Our text teaches that in every life there is one or other of two processes going forward. In the one case it is a process of "perishing"; and in the other a process of "being saved." "The word of the Cross is to them that are *perishing* foolishness; but unto us which are *being saved* it is the power of God." Those out of Christ are, day by day, perishing more and more. Their natures are undergoing a process of hardening. They are getting further and further away from the life of God. But in the case of the Christian, who is living the true life of faith, it is the opposite of this. He is day by day being saved more and more: he is getting nearer and nearer to God; he is being more and more conformed to the image of God as seen in Jesus Christ.

And wherever this saving process is being carried forward, it is being done under the power of the Cross. It is the Cross which makes sin hateful: which makes

Christ precious; which draws the sinner close to the Saviour's side, and keeps him there. And so the language of the true believer, who is being more and more changed into the image of Christ, is :—

The Cross! it takes our guilt away;
  It holds the fainting spirit up;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day,
  And sweetens every bitter cup;

It makes the coward spirit brave,
  And nerves the feeble arm for fight;
It takes the terror from the grave,
  And gilds the bed of death with light.

III

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

" Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins " (Acts xiii. 38).

" Be it known unto you, therefore, brethren, that through this Man is proclaimed unto you remission of sins " (Acts xiii. 38, R.V.).

FORGIVENESS OF SINS

Acts xiii. 38-39

God is a great forgiver. This is the truth which I am sure God wishes me to preach. For while He is just and holy and will by no means clear the guilty, He wishes every sinner distinctly to understand that this in no way makes Him less a forgiving God, a God of pardoning mercy.

There is something extremely precious in the announcement which Jehovah made of Himself when He came down on Mount Sinai, amid such scenes of awful grandeur, to proclaim His fiery law. As he passed by Moses, He proclaimed Himself to be, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, *forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.*" Sinai was the last place where we should have expected to have heard of forgiveness, and yet there we have it as clearly announced as on Calvary itself. Both Sinai and Calvary bear witness to the strict requirements of God's law and the unbending justice of His character,

but the voice of both is the voice of forgiveness. If God proclaimed His law, it was that man might see he had broken it, and therefore needed forgiveness; and if He set forth how strict were its requirements, it was that man might learn how greatly he had transgressed, and, therefore, how much he needed forgiveness. And when we behold Jehovah inflicting the full penalty of His violated law upon the person of His own Son on the Cross, we learn how deeply the thought of forgiveness was lodged in His bosom, and how great was His desire to forgive. God is a great forgiver.

I

Forgiveness is the Great Announcement of the Gospel

It is the great good news. When Jesus had finished His work on earth and just before His ascension, He gave to His disciples the commission "That repentance and *remission of sins* should be preached in His name among all nations" (Luke xxiv. 47). And accordingly the great Sermon preached by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, when three thousand persons were converted, contained the command, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins*" (Acts ii. 38). And when the same Apostle, soon after, preached before the Council

at Jerusalem, he said, "Him (*i.e.* Jesus) hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and *forgiveness of sins*" (Acts v. 31). And in like manner here, in our text, when Paul preaches to the people of Antioch his language is, "Be it known unto you, therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."

(1) Now, our text, as well as the other passages of Scripture which I have just quoted, implies that *all men need forgiveness.* The Apostle makes no exceptions in addressing his audience; he takes it for granted that they are all interested in hearing of the forgiveness of sins.

There are few persons possessed of ordinary intelligence but will admit that they have done some things which were wrong, and that, therefore, they need some forgiveness. And yet our Lord on one occasion used a very remarkable expression. He said He was not come to call "the righteous" but "sinners." By this He could not have meant that there were any really righteous persons to be found, for "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. iii. 10). The context shows that He meant to say there were some who thought themselves righteous, or thought their sins so few and trifling as not to be worth mentioning. So the Saviour affirmed that these were not the kind

of people He came to save; that those who would be saved by Him must realize that they are sinners and confess themselves such.

Now, while all of you whom I now address will probably acknowledge that, in common with all others, you are "sinners," it is only those of you who realize that you are condemned, and "children of wrath" in danger of perishing, to whom the announcement of forgiveness will sound as good news. But to such of you it will be *a gospel*, the very thing you earnestly desire. When conversing with one anxious about his salvation, I sometimes ask him the cause of his trouble, and what it is he wishes. And often I find the individual unable to give a satisfactory reply; he is unable to explain what it is he thinks would bring him present relief. But when I suggest, is it the pardon of your sins you want? I have not a moment to wait for a response. The anxious one catches at this as the very thing he desires.

It is now about four hundred years since a young man was one day overtaken on a journey by a thunderstorm. The lightning flashed and the thunder pealed, and a thunderbolt fell at his feet. He felt as if on the brink of eternity, and that he was not fit to die. He fell on his knees and begged God to spare him, vowing that if He did, he would devote himself henceforth to a religious life. His anxiety of mind continued,

and a short time after, in order to fulfil his vow, he entered a monastery. There he betook himself to what Rome prescribes for a sin-sick soul. He fasted and prayed, and performed penances until his body became thoroughly emaciated, and he was brought to the brink of the grave. One day as he lay in his cell moaning and crying "Oh! my sins! my sins! my sins!" an old monk came to him and trying to comfort him, whispered in his ear the well known sentence of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." The young man caught up the words. They sounded like music in his ears. "Then," he said to himself, "there is such a thing as forgiveness." It was a ray of light which had entered his soul. The bare possibility of pardon brought comfort for the moment to his disconsolate mind. He knew not yet, how this forgiveness was to be obtained, but the resolution was formed that no matter how long he should have to wait, or what he should have to do, he would never rest satisfied until the blessing was his. Would that all of you, who are now unconverted, saw your condition to be such that the announcement of my text would in like manner bring joy to your hearts!

(2) And yet I think there are few unsaved ones here to-day who do not *more or less desire to obtain forgiveness*. You sometimes think of death, and

judgment, and eternity; and as you think of these things you are not happy. You sometimes think of that day, which may soon come, when you will lie on that bed from which you will never rise; when the curtains will be drawn; when friends will move softly about the room speaking only in whispers; when the death-dew will be on the brow, and your spirit hovering on the verge of eternity. And as you think of this, do you not sigh in your soul and say, "Oh! that I knew my sins were forgiven; how happy I should be!"

(3) Well, my friend, the truth which I wish you to receive is that *this forgiveness which you desire and which you think would make you happy, may be yours now.* Unto you is preached the forgiveness of your sins—and forgiveness NOW. It is well for you to fix distinctly in your mind the truth, that the forgiveness of all your sins lies at the threshold of the Christian life. You receive this gift at the very first step you take heavenwards. You have not long and patiently to wait for it. It is not a thing to be obtained only at death or at the judgment. It is to be had now. You have not even to wait until you repent more thoroughly, spend days in agonising prayer, and get better instructed. If you will just now take up the position of a guilty, helpless sinner, in danger of perishing; and if you will just now receive with hearty satisfaction the sinner's

only Saviour, God will this moment write opposite your name, "*Forgiven.*" When we believe on Jesus our sins *are* forgiven; it is not merely that they *will* be. The Apostle John, addressing Christians in his first Epistle, says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins *are* forgiven you for His name's sake" (1 John ii. 12). And this is not to any of you, whom I now address, a new doctrine. It is the same which you have been taught from childhood. It is the doctrine of your Catechism. "Justification," as you have been instructed, "is an act of God's free grace"—mark you, it is an *act*, a thing done and completed at once—"an act of God's free grace, wherein *He pardoneth all our sins*, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."

When God comes to you in the hour of justification, that is, in the hour when you are led to trust in Jesus as your Saviour, He finds you as a criminal in the dock, under sentence of condemnation, and He brings you out of the dock and receives you into the family circle. From that moment you are no longer a condemned criminal, but a child. "Beloved, *now* are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be" (1 John iii. 2). You are pardoned. You are taken into the family of God. You are a child. Yes, a child; but not a perfect child; it may

be a very disobedient child; a child needing daily to acknowledge your faults to your Father; a child needing daily to go with the language of the child's prayer on your lips—"My Father who art in heaven, forgive me my debts as I forgive my debtors." And should you fail to confess your daily faults, your Father in heaven may have to deal with you, even as an earthly father does with the child he loves; He may have to "chastise" you; yea, He may have to "scourge" you. If you go astray, He will chasten you "for your profit"; but one thing He will not do, He will never put you out of the family.

(4) No; He will never put you out of His family, for I would have you understand that the forgiveness which is preached unto you is *a complete forgiveness.* It is not that God looks lightly on your sins, or that He overlooks them for the time. He puts them away for ever. When He forgives, He *does* forgive. He says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sins no more." He says, "I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions." He declares, He will "cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." And, then do we not sing in the glorious hundred-and-third Psalm:—

> As far as East is distant from
> The West, so far hath He
> From us removed, in His love,
> ALL OUR INIQUITY.

God does not pardon and then punish. His gospel is better than that—His pardon is a real pardon.

(5) And then, it is *the forgiveness of all your sins* which is preached unto you. In the verse following our text it is written, "And by Him *all* that believe are justified from *all* things." How precious are those two "alls"! "All that believe"! "Justified from all things"! It is not merely the little sins; it is the great sins as well; the aggravated sins; the long-continued sins; the sins which have grown into habits —ALL YOUR SINS.

The gospel of God is a glorious gospel, and worthy, surely, of all acceptation.

II

You will now ask, *How is this forgiveness to be obtained?* Oh, with what eagerness I have seen anxious ones listening to the answer given to this question! And what *mistakes* are made on this very point! One seems to think that his good deeds will be weighed against the bad, and that God will forgive the bad for the sake of the good! He forgets that God's law demands perfect obedience and declares, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. iii. 10). He forgets that "whosoever shall keep the whole law,

and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (Jas. ii. 10). Another thinks he will be forgiven because he has not been so bad as others. Many years ago, three men were executed at Warwick; one had been a coiner, and the other two house-breakers who had also committed murder. When at the place of execution, the coiner was heard to fortify himself by saying, "I never killed anybody; I never hurt anybody. I hope God will have mercy on me." Still another thinks he will cast himself on the pity of God, and just hope that God will let him off.

These methods will not do. Our text supplies the true answer, "*Through this Man.*" Forgiveness is preached as coming to us "through this Man," and is not preached as coming in any other way. It is "through this Man" that it is possible for God to forgive sins. And I need not tell you who this Man is. He is the Man Christ Jesus. He is God manifest in the flesh. He is that One "who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 6-8). He bore the penalty of the law, and satisfied the Divine justice, so that God can now "be just, and the justifier of him

who believes in Jesus." God's mercy is thus a holy mercy—a mercy which does homage to justice. It is the only mercy which would be in harmony with God's character.

The forgiveness, then, which is preached unto you is "through this Man," and is *by faith in Him.* In verse 39 it is said, "And by Him *all that believe* are justified from all things." "Only believe" and the blessing of pardon is yours. Only believe on the Man Christ Jesus as standing in your stead, as living and dying for you; only trust in Him as your Almighty Saviour, and your sins, which are many, are all put away. Only believe and the pardon which Jesus purchased becomes yours in possession. The young man in the monastery, to whom I have already referred, rejoiced in the thought that forgiveness was possible, but as yet he knew not how to obtain it. After some time, however, an opportunity arose for him to visit Rome, and he hoped that surely there he would obtain ease for his troubled conscience. Accordingly he set out with high expectations. As showing the feelings which animated him, we are told that when he came within sight of the city, he prostrated himself on the ground and exclaimed, "Holy Rome, I salute thee." He was not, however, long in Holy Rome when he found it was not such a holy place. He was greatly shocked by what he beheld, but what could he do except follow

the directions of him whom he had been taught to regard as Christ's vicar? And one thing which a conscience-stricken sinner was directed to do, in order to expiate his sins, was to climb on his knees what is called Pilate's staircase, repeating at each step a prescribed prayer. One day, in company with others, he was performing this task, when suddenly a text of Scripture seized his mind. It was a text which had sounded in his ears before, but never as now. It was a text which the Apostle Paul, 1,400 years before, had quoted to the Christians of that same city. The text was, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. i. 17). The just shall live by faith; then not by penances, not by repeated prayers, not by performances. He rose from his knees and ran from the place as one ashamed of being seen engaged in such superstitious folly. Light from God's presence had entered his soul. The fetters with which his soul had been bound were broken. He was a spiritual free man, ready to bring spiritual emancipation to multitudes of his fellow-countrymen. And as Luther obtained forgiveness, and the sense of forgiveness, so must you. It is through "this Man"; and it is "by faith."

III

WHAT A BLESSING TO POSSESS THIS FORGIVENESS; AND TO HAVE IN OUR BOSOMS A SENSE OF IT!

IT is to have joy and peace. Everything seems to rejoice in the eyes of a pardoned soul. As one has said, "O, that was a handsome day when God for Christ's sake forgave all my sins"! It was so with the converts on the Day of Pentecost. They "eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God." So too, the Ethiopian eunuch: "he went on his way rejoicing."

Would you obtain this forgiveness? Remember it must be while you are here. It must be while your short gospel-day lasts. The rainbow of mercy shines "while it is day"; but the "night cometh" when there will be no bow in the heavens. It is yet with you "the acceptable year of the Lord," but this will be followed by "the day of vengeance of our God." Those who refuse mercy "shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power." Alexander the Great, in his wars of conquest, when he had laid siege to a city, first displayed a white flag. It was the symbol of mercy if the people would open their gates and receive him. But if this was disregarded, soon there was hoisted a red flag. It meant blood and fire and

death. So, in like manner, God now displays to you the white banner of Gospel grace and forgiveness. If you will open the doors of your hearts, eternal life will be yours. But if you continue to despise His love and mercy, and trample the precious blood of His Son under your feet, He will assuredly raise the red banner, and "you shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on you."

IV

THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION

"Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany Salvation" (Hebrews vi. 9).

THINGS THAT ACCOMPANY SALVATION

HEB. VI. 9

THERE can be no more important question for any one than this: Am I safe? Am I secure against ever suffering the torments of hell? When I die shall I be happy? And it is a question on which I am persuaded you all feel more or less concern. Could I go down from this pulpit, and, passing from pew to pew, point out who of you are safe and who are not, I am sure it would be an anxious moment with you all. I cannot do that, for God alone can read the heart, but what I desire to do, as I may be enabled, is to point out what, according to the Word of God, are some of the things which always "accompany salvation." By an honest application of these things to your own case some of you may be led to say, "I am not safe." And if this be so, though it be a disagreeable truth, surely the sooner you know it the better. Others of you, I trust, will derive the comfortable assurance that you have passed from death unto life. And may God the Holy Spirit speak to each of us by and with His Word.

I

I SHALL first speak of SOME THINGS WHICH ACCOMPANY SALVATION IN THE ACT OF PASSING OUT OF A STATE OF SPIRITUAL DEATH INTO A STATE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE.

(1) And the first of these which I shall mention, because it naturally comes first in order, is *a conviction of our sinfulness.* By this I do not mean a general admission that we are all sinners. I mean sin as a heavy burden on the conscience, like the experience of David in the thirty-eighth Psalm when he says, "Mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me." I mean the consciousness that sin permeates our whole being: that, like a spiritual leprosy, it has tainted the whole soul. I mean also the clear perception that the guilt of this sin remaining upon us must for ever shut us out of heaven.

Now, this conviction of sin, or "true sense of sin," as it is sometimes called, always accompanies salvation. I may safely say that where there has been no sense of sin, there has as yet been no salvation. You have it in the Publican whose prayer was, "God, be merciful to me a *sinner.*" You have it in the Prodigal, whose language was, "Father, I have *sinned.*" You have it in the case of the three thousand on the Day of

Pentecost who " were *pricked in their heart,*" and said, " Men and brethren, what shall we do ? "

Conviction of sin always accompanies salvation, but the experience of different persons in the matter may be found to be very different. In some cases you may find the individual totally overwhelmed under the burden of guilt and the sense of God's displeasure. The bitter tear trickles down the cheek, and wretchedness seizes upon the soul. Whereas, in other cases, the mind may be gradually enlightened to see the sinfulness of sin ; and we might say that a sense of sin and a reliance on the atonement of Jesus Christ spring up almost at the same moment and grow gradually together from less to more. It is only the light of heaven let in upon the mind which can reveal to it the true nature of sin ; but God does not always let in that light in the same fashion. Sometimes it is as though you were seated in a very dark room when a match is applied to the gas, and suddenly there is change from darkness to light which attracts the attention of every one. The point of transition is distinctly marked. But it is not thus the light of day comes. In the early morning, on the far distant horizon, there is at first a faint, very faint streak of light—so faint that you can scarcely tell when the light begins to prevail and the darkness to recede ; the light comes gradually and gradually the darkness

wears away. Some may be aroused from their death sleep with all the agitation of a person being shaken over the pit of woe, while others may be awakened with all the gentleness with which a mother awakes her sleeping babe. The jailor of Philippi's conversion was with " trembling " and " Sirs, what must I do to be saved ? " But of Lydia, converted at the same place, and almost at the same time, it is simply said, " Whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended to the things which were spoken."

But the important thing is this—Whether the conviction of our sinfulness and of our lost condition come upon the mind suddenly and powerfully, or whether it steal in silently and gently, it always accompanies salvation. Where there has been no conviction of sin and danger there can be no salvation. It is only as we realize our need that we can appreciate Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

And yet I think it important to guard you against a fatal mistake sometimes made about this matter. You must not conclude that because at some period of your life you have felt very sensibly your sin and, perhaps, wept bitter tears of grief, you are certainly a regenerate child of God. Conviction always accompanies salvation but by itself is not sufficient evidence of conversion. Convictions are often stifled. In all probability there are few who have not at some time

been deeply exercised about their spiritual state, but in many cases, it may be, they have hushed their fears to rest or by the indulgence of sinful pleasures have driven them away and they are still far from God. Perhaps the commonest way of getting rid of anxious thoughts about sin and salvation is by an attempted reformation of outward conduct. A man has been pursuing a course of open sin, and by some occurrence he is led to reflect upon his position. He says to himself, "This will never do. If I go on thus I shall surely come to an evil end. I must turn a new leaf." He does turn a new leaf. He gives up his Sabbath-breaking, or profane swearing, or drunkenness. And every one who knows him says, "What a change! He is a new man!" Yes, and the man says to himself, "I am now all right; I am safe for eternity; I would not now be afraid to die." Ah! all may not be right. Before he was a Publican, now he may only be a Pharisee. He is a different man, but he may not be a "new man" in Christ Jesus. Outward reformation of the conduct is one thing, and inward regeneration of the heart is another.

(2) Hence, a second thing which always accompanies salvation is *a conviction of our total inability to obtain an entrance to heaven by the very best deeds which it is possible for us to perform.* It is one of the hardest things in the world to convince a sinner of the truth

of the text: "By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Rom. iii. 20); or of that word in Isaiah: "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Is. lxiv. 6).

We must be brought to view the matter in this light: suppose I could begin and please God perfectly from this hour until the moment of death, and never again offend Him in thought, word, or deed, what about the past? There is all that debt of my past life uncancelled; there are all my past sins rising mountain high. How is all this guilt to be removed? But, then, when I look at my present actions in the light of God's holiness, and in the light of His perfect law, can I do what I have supposed? Can I love God with all my heart and soul and strength and mind and my neighbour as myself, never coming short in thought, word, or deed? As an honest man I must acknowledge I cannot —I cannot save myself.

(3) And, then, if we are brought to see ourselves thus—if we are brought to see ourselves as utterly sinful, and utterly helpless—there is a third thing which always accompanies salvation, viz., *a clear discovery of the infinite value of the obedience and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.* Since childhood, it may be, we have been hearing about the life and death of the Son of God, and we may imagine we understand all about these things. But if we are first convinced of our

sinfulness, and secondly of our helplessness, we shall, then, be convinced that we never before knew anything of the meaning of "the precious blood of Christ." Precious blood indeed! "*Justified freely* by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. iii. 24)! O, that has a new meaning! "When I see the blood I will pass over you" (Ex. xii. 13)! Now we know what that means.

> Nothing good have I
> Whereby Thy grace to claim—
> I'll wash my garment white,
> In the blood of Calvary's Lamb.
>
> . . . .
>
> Jesus paid it all—all to Him I owe;
> Sin had left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow.

II

I HAVE thus endeavoured to describe the experience of a sinner in passing from death into life—out of darkness into God's marvellous light. Let me now refer to SOME THINGS WHICH ACCOMPANY, OR FOLLOW AFTER THIS EVENT, and become the evidence that it has taken place.

(1) If a man has been pursuing a course of open sin, there will be *a change in his outward conduct.* Let me lay stress on this, for surely it ought to lead some to see that they are not safe. When the drunkard is converted he becomes sober; the blasphemer abandons

his oaths; he who indulged in filthy conversation becomes chaste in his speech and behaviour; the covetous and avaricious man, according as he is spiritually enlightened, becomes generous and liberal; the harsh and cruel man becomes kind and affectionate. One passage of Scripture will be enough on this point—(1 Cor. vi. 9-11): "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but *ye were washed*, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God."

(2) Another thing which accompanies salvation is *a felt contest between the old nature, not yet dead, and the new, begotten of the Holy Spirit.* You will understand what I mean if you will refer to the latter part of the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, where the Apostle Paul describes the warfare waged within himself. He says, "I find the law to be that to me who would do good evil is present. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members." And so strong, yet

so hateful does he find this "law of sin"—this old nature still existing within him, that he exclaims, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" True enough he immediately answers his own question, saying, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord"—He will deliver me. Still his present experience is that which he has described, His experience, as a Christian man, is what he describes elsewhere when he declares, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary the one to the other" (Gal. v. 17).

Do you experience anything of this contest? Are you in the power of a new life within you, yea in the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling within you, fighting against the desires of the flesh, and fighting against them because you hate them? Or, are you "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind"? (Ep. ii. 3). If this latter, assuredly you have good reason to question your safety.

(3) Again, *a willingness to work in Christ's service* always accompanies salvation. We always expect that a person receiving a benefit will, if a properly disposed individual, feel grateful for it and be ready to express his gratitude. Bestow some signal favour upon a person, and if you will permit him in some way to show his gratitude, you bestow upon him a still further

favour. Now, God, through Jesus Christ, has bestowed upon the hell-deserving sinner the inestimable gift of eternal life. And will there be no feeling of gratitude? Yes, there will. And it is a still further token of God's kindness that He has assigned to every such redeemed one "his work" whereby he may show his thankfulness. The saved soul will work for Christ, and be glad to be permitted to do so. Bunyan was right in putting into the mouth of Hopeful these words: "Had I a thousand gallons of blood in my body I could spill it all for the sake of the Lord Jesus." One reason why the author of this Epistle from which our text is taken was "persuaded better things, and things that accompany salvation" of those to whom he wrote was that they had showed "work and labour of love" (verse 10), and that they had "ministered to the saints" and continued to do so (verse 11).

(4) Still further, *a concern for the souls of the unconverted* always accompanies salvation. A person who knows what it is to be saved cannot be unconcerned about those in danger of perishing. Paul, after his conversion, said, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved" (Rom. x. 1). And as he thought of the matter he declared, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh"

(Rom. ix. 2). And this was only like the Master Himself who, when He thought of the sins and sorrows of the City of Jerusalem, "wept over it" (Luke xix. 41). Need I say that if our hearts are moved by thoughts of those who are perishing, we shall be found putting forth efforts for their salvation? The true picture of the Christian is not that of one who, coming up out of the wreck, holds the rock with both hands, heedless of those still struggling in the waves; but it is that of one who firmly holds the rock with one hand for his own safety, and reaches down the other to help his fellow-man. The Christian is not satisfied to go to heaven alone.

(5) Another thing that accompanies salvation is *a love for the society of the good and pious.* The Apostle John makes this a great mark of a Christian. He says, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 John iii. 14). In fact it is Christ's own mark of a Christian: "By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John xiii. 35). Put an unconverted man into the society of the truly godly and force him to listen to their conversation and to join them in their works and ways, and you take the most effectual way to torment him. Yea, take such an one, with his nature still unregenerate, and translate him right to heaven; it would be no heaven to him. He

would have no relish for its society or its exercises. He would lack capacity to enjoy it.

(6) The only other thing which I shall at present mention is *an open confession of Christ.* This too accompanies salvation. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 10). Jesus laid special emphasis on this. He said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father, with the holy angels" (Mark viii. 38). It may be hard to face the sneers of unconverted companions; it may be difficult to be different from those about us in the world; but love to Christ—the power of the new life in the soul, will enable us to do it.

And now, applying all these things to your own case, how think you is it with your soul? Have you reason to conclude it is well? What, then, are you to do? You are to go on your way rejoicing, still looking unto Jesus, and trying to convince every one how happy a thing it is to be a Christian.

But, have you reason to fear you are not standing on salvation ground? Then, what are you to do? This very moment, by a definite act of submission, take the once crucified and now living and ever present Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour. Take

Him as He is freely offered to you in the Gospel and even now you shall pass out of death into life. "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life: he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

V

THE SECRET OF THE SAINTLY LIFE

By faith " (Hebrews xi. 4).

THE SECRET OF THE SAINTLY LIFE

HEB. XI. 4

"FAITH" is a great word in this chapter. It occurs not less than twenty-three times. "By faith" is a great phrase in this chapter. It occurs some twenty-one times. "By faith" denotes a great truth in our religion. By faith the individual becomes a Christian at the first; by faith he lives his Christian life; and by faith he gains all his Christian triumphs. In the closing verse of the preceding chapter the Christian is described as one who does not "draw back unto perdition; but who believes unto the saving of the soul." He begins by believing and continues to believe until his salvation becomes an accomplished fact.

This remarkable eleventh chapter seems just to teach one thing, viz., *That faith is the secret and spring of the saintly life.* By it those Old Testament worthies became what they were and accomplished what they did. By it their noble characters were built up and their lives made illustrious.

Seeing, then, that faith is so essential to the Christian life, I desire to emphasise this truth by calling your attention to a few aspects of the subject.

(1) First of all, *it is by faith we come into possession of the benefit of Christ's redemptive work, and therefore, without it we cannot be saved.* The words of Christ Himself are decisive on this point, "He that believeth, and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned" (Mark xvi. 16). And it is still further declared in the chapter from which our text is taken that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (verse 6).

It is a glorious truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and that His blood cleanseth from all sin. But what signifies this to any of you who have not faith in Him? Without faith Christ shall profit you nothing. You may have prayed. You may have read the Bible. You may have sat at the Table of the Lord. You may have been zealous as the Apostle Paul. You may have been earnest as a seraph. You may have been a Sabbath School teacher, an office-bearer of the Church, a minister of the Gospel. Yet if you lack personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour "you are yet in your sins."

In presence of a truth such as this, and it is an elementary truth of our religion, it surely becomes us all to pause for a moment, while we each ask ourselves,

Have I ever yet by faith apprehended the Son of God as my Saviour? O, let us try to have a clear answer to this question; for if wrong here, all is wrong; but if right here, thank God, all is right. Yes, all is right though I may not be all I ought to be, nor all I wish to be, nor all that by grace I hope yet to be. If I have a hold of Christ at all; yea, should it not be a *hold* but only a *touch*, He will not suffer me to perish. Even to the touch of faith He will respond, imparting His saving virtue.

Let there be no mistake about the nature of the faith that thus becomes the channel of such blessing. There are various kinds of faith; or rather, perhaps, I should say, faith concerns itself with various objects. There is faith in a doctrine, faith in a creed, faith in the Bible, faith in a feeling. But the faith that saves is more than all these. It is faith in CHRIST. It is not faith in a *thing*, but in a *person*; and that person the living, loving Lord Jesus Christ, now at the right hand of God. Faith in a doctrine, however true that doctrine may be, is faith in a thing. Faith in a creed, however orthodox that creed may be, is faith in a thing. Faith in the Bible is faith in a thing. Faith in a feeling, however good that feeling may be, is faith in a thing. And faith in a thing, let it be repeated, cannot save. It must be faith in a person able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God through Him.

The attitude of the soul in exercising this faith at first, as I understand it, is this—I come to the Bible and read such a statement as that of John iii. 16, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." I believe this statement to be true. I take my stand upon it as upon a rock which cannot be moved. And standing there I look up to Him of whom it speaks. I say to Him, "Lord, I know my need of a Saviour, and here is Thine own declaration, that whosoever believeth on Thee shall not perish. Lord, I believe on Thee, I trust Thee as my Saviour, and I submit myself to Thee as my King." If I do this sincerely, meaning it in my heart, I have exercised the faith that saves the soul; I have by faith passed out of death into life.

(2) Then, *it is by faith all the other graces of the Christian character are maintained and developed.* Faith is the foundation on which "love," "joy," "peace" and all the others are built. If you are to love Christ, faith must first apprehend His loveliness. If you are to rejoice in Him, faith must first appropriate Him, so that you can say," My Beloved is mine and I am His." Hence the Apostle Peter makes faith the root of the tree of Christian character. "Add to your faith virtue," he says; "and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to

temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity" (2 Pet. i. 5-7). Or, as it is more correctly rendered in the Revised Version, "In your faith, supply virtue; and in your virtue, knowledge; and in your knowledge, temperance; and in your temperance, patience; and in your patience, godliness; and in your godliness, love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren, love!" These graces spring the one out of the other as the branches of a tree. But faith is first. It is the root. And as you cannot have a tree without a root, so you cannot have Christian character without faith in Christ. The "graces," as the very name implies, can only be kept in exercise by continuous supplies of grace from the Divine Fountain; and faith is the channel through which it flows down from God. And in proportion as this channel is broad and deep will the abounding grace of God be poured into your soul. According to your faith will love, joy, peace, and all the others, abound in your Christian experience.

(3) Then again, *it is by faith that we secure answers to our prayers.* I am sure you all believe in the propriety of prayer; and I suppose you all sometimes pray. But then, remember, yes let us all remember, that without faith there is no security for our obtaining an answer. You may stretch a wire from this country to America,

but unless there be in it the electric current it will convey no message. Faith is the electricity of prayer; it takes our petitions direct to heaven, and brings the answer back. What a mighty instrument is prayer when charged with the element of faith! Just listen to these words of Jesus, "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, *believe that ye have received them*, and ye shall have them." And again, "Have faith in God; for verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith, shall come to pass, *he shall have whatsoever he saith*" (Mark xi. 23, 24). And so the Apostle James says, "Let a man ask in faith, nothing doubting; for he that doubteth is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and tossed." And he adds, "Let not that man," the man that doubteth, "think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (James i. 6, 8).

It is not so much more prayer we want, as more faith in our prayers. I do not mean to say that God never hears the prayers of an unconverted man. I believe He often does. God is sovereign; and He who hears the ravens when they cry, often has regard to men in their unenlightened state as they pour out the miseries of their heart before Him. But in the case of His own regenerate children when in faith they plead His promises, it is not merely that He *may* answer

them; He *must*. He has pledged His word to grant their requests.

(4) And again, *it is by faith we obtain the victory over our spiritual foes*. That grand old warrior, Paul, knew this truth well. He pointed out to the Ephesian Christians the different parts of the whole armour of God. There were the shoes, and the helmet, and the breastplate, and the sword; but he solemnly said, "Above all take the shield of faith." Whatever part you overlook be sure of the shield of faith, "wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one"; or rather, as I think the meaning is, Be sure of the over-all shield of faith—the shield which may be turned in every direction to protect every part. By this you shall be able to quench every dart of the devil, no matter from what quarter it may come.

How helpless is a Christian with little faith! but how invincible with great faith! The world, the flesh, and the devil, with all their allied hosts, may attack your soul, but so long as you have real faith in God and His promises you can defy them all. The world may present its allurements and attractions, its wealth, and honours, and pleasures, as the price of your soul; but faith brings before you better things than these, "things not seen but eternal," things not seen by the worldling, else he would not sell his soul so cheap as he usually does. It is here with the Christian as with the servant

of Elisha long ago in the city of Dothan. He and his master were hemmed in on every side by their enemies, the army of the King of Syria. "Alas, my master!" he said, "how shall we do?" "Fear not," replied the Prophet; "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them!" How strange this sounded to the servant! Here were two men in a strange place, and an armed host encamped on every side, waiting to apprehend them, and yet the Prophet says, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." But it is explained when Elisha prays, "*Lord, open his eyes that he may see.*" His eyes are opened, and lo! he sees another army surrounding the army of the King of Syria; he sees that the mountains round about are full of chariots and horsemen of fire, the army of God come down for the protection of His two servants. And so the Christian, strong in faith, has his eyes open; he sees God and all the honours and rewards He can bestow: heaven and its inexhaustible riches, eternity and all its glories. And in comparison with these, what are all the riches and honours and pleasures of earth!

(5) Then again, *it is by faith we secure success in our Christian service.* Those who have done great things in the Kingdom of grace have invariably been men of great faith. Had they not been so, the works they accomplished would never have been undertaken.

Unbelief always says, "It can't be done! There is no use trying! It is sure to fail! There is no use going to speak to that man about his soul. He has continued too long in his sinful course, and is too hardened in heart. He would only laugh at you." Faith says, "I know I cannot change that man's heart, but God can—God is stronger than the devil any day. And if I can only go to him with a strong enough faith, I go with all the power of God behind me. Faith links my weakness to God's omnipotence." And so it comes to pass that miracles of grace are achieved by the weakest and most unlikely agents.

Those ten spies sent by Moses to view the land of promise, and to bring back some word that would encourage the people, were a faithless lot. They came back and told the people, "It cannot be done. There is no use trying. The people of the land are giants, and we in their presence are but as grasshoppers. The cities are walled and very great. We never could take possession of the land." And thus they discouraged, the whole congregation of the Lord's people, and as a result the whole nation—the whole Church of God—had to wander for forty years in the wilderness.

Caleb and Joshua were of a different spirit. They spoke the language of faith. "True enough," they said, "there are giants and great cities; but we are well able to subdue them. If the Lord delights in us, as we know

He does, He will, according to His promise, give us the land. Let us, therefore, go up at once, and possess it." But it was then, as often still, the faithless ones were the large majority; they were ten to two, and they carried the day.

The great weakness of the Church to-day, even as in the days of Moses, is want of faith. In nearly every congregation of Christians there is a large number of leaders whose only mission seems to be to discourage the people, and to wail, "It can't be done." What is wanted to take possession of the world for Christ is a Church that believes the promises, and is prepared to act upon them.

(6) Lastly, *it is by faith we get comfort in our times of trouble.* We all have our trials and troubles and difficulties, but faith keeps our heads above the waves. It whispers in our ears words of hope and courage. It bids us pull for the shore and soon we shall be there. It tells us that though the road may be rough it will not be long, and all will be well in the end. The fact is, if as Christians we only really believed the half of what we profess to believe, we should always be happy. Faith, mighty Faith!

> She can pluck mountains from their rooted thrones,
> And hurl them into ocean; and from pain,
> And prisons, and contempt extort the palm
> Of everlasting triumph. She doth tread
> Upon the neck of pride, like the free wind

On angry ocean. Lo! with step erect
She walks o'er whirlpool, waves, and martyr fires
And depths of darkness and chaotic voids;
Dissolving worlds, rent heavens, and dying suns;
Yea, and o'er paradises of earth's bliss,
And oceans of earth's gold, and pyramids
And temples of earth's glory: all these pave
Her conquering path to heaven—all these she spurns
With feet fire-shod, because her hand is placed
Immoveably in God's; her eye doth rest
Unchangeable on His; nor will she stop
Till, having crossed the stormy waves of pain
And fiery trial, she may lay her head
Upon her Father's breast, and take the crown
From love's rejoicing hand.

VI

PLEASING GOD

"He pleased God" (Hebrews xi. 5)

"He had been well-pleasing unto God" (Hebrews xi., 5, R.V.).

PLEASING GOD

HEBREWS XI. 5

ENOCH pleased God, and he lived under the olden dispensation of grace, when God was not so fully revealed as He is now. He pleased God in his daily walk and, in his time, no part of our Bible had been written. Surely, then, it is possible for Christians, living in these times of greater light and privilege, to please God.

I

IN Enoch, therefore, we have AN EXAMPLE WHICH WE DO WELL TO FOLLOW.

Our Catechism gives a beautiful answer to the question, What is the chief end of man? It says, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever." This answer has often been admired for its brief comprehensiveness. But in our text, I think, we have an answer to the same question which is still briefer and quite as comprehensive. The great end of man's existence is "to please God." This is his duty and

privilege here and hereafter. It was in even similar language that Jesus, the great representative Man, summed up His life on earth. He said, " I do always those things which please God " (John viii. 29).

But you may, perhaps, be disposed to say that while Jesus could always do the things which pleased God, this is not possible for us, even for the best of us. And so you may put this question aside as one which does not practically concern you. For the Christian to take up this attitude is a great mistake, and the result cannot but be a great spiritual loss. It is quite true we cannot live a sinless life as Jesus did; and it is also true that the best we can do is very defective. But Enoch was not a sinless man any more than we are, and he pleased God; so pleased Him that He gave him a special testimonial of His approbation, by spiritualizing his body without its having to pass through the grave. He translated him, as He did Elijah afterwards, in presence of his fellow-men. So far, then, as it was possible for Enoch to please God, it is possible for you and me.

Though none of us is without sin, we can do much that will afford satisfaction to God and to His Son, Jesus Christ. It even pleases God when a Christian confesses his sin and shortcomings; when he is humble and broken-hearted because of his faults. The sacrifices of God—the sacrifices which He will not despise,

but with which He is well-pleased, are a broken heart (Ps. li. 17). It pleases God when a Christian endeavours in whatever way he can, to do good to his fellowmen. "To do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. xiii. 16). It pleases God when Christians are faithful in the various relationships of life. "Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord" (Col. iii. 20).

Let us, then, settle it definitely in our minds that in this matter, Enoch is for us an example: that which he did it is possible for us to do.

II

But not only have we here an example which we ought to follow: WE HAVE A MOTIVE WHICH OUGHT TO ACTUATE US IN ALL OUR CHRISTIAN CONDUCT. Whatever we do ought to be done with the single desire of pleasing God: or as Dr. Judson expressed it, "of pleasing Jesus." After that great missionary had been thirty years in Burmah, on his return to his own country, he was asked by a gentleman whom he met, why he should have sacrificed his valuable life among strangers in a heathen country, most of whom were incapable of understanding his instructions. His simple reply was, "To please Jesus." And when addressing a company of students with a view to induce

them to become foreign missionaries, he urged them to undertake the work from the right motive, "Not merely," he said, "to save the souls of the heathen, but to please Jesus."

Here is a lesson which, I think, most of us require to learn. We require, in our Christian service, and indeed in all our duties, to act from a higher motive—from the highest motive of all, to please Jesus. We ought to do them because He wants us to do them; because the doing of them will afford Him satisfaction. It ought not to be simply because some Christian friend has asked us; or because we think it is what the Christian community expects us to do. Jesus ought to be in our minds. It is possible to do much that is right in itself, because we have acquired the habit, because we have come to act as automatons; and Jesus may not be in our thoughts at all. Not thus can we walk with Jesus. Not thus did Enoch walk with God. His walking with God was a conscious fellowship, an acting consciously in His presence. So ought it to be with us.

Let us ask ourselves, How much have we done thus? How much of our work has been undertaken with the sole object of pleasing Jesus, of affording satisfaction to Him who has redeemed us with His precious blood, and given us His Holy Spirit?

III

THERE are a few QUESTIONS WHICH WE OUGHT TO ASK, AND ENDEAVOUR TO ANSWER, CONCERNING THIS HIGH DUTY AND PRIVILEGE.

(1) And first, *How are we to please God?* For so far, I have presented the subject in its general aspect. But this passage of Scripture teaches that there is something fundamentally necessary; something without which the duty cannot possibly be performed. In the verse immediately following our text it is stated, "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

"Without faith!" That is, without faith in God as He has been revealed to us in our time. For faith in God now means much more than it did in the days of Enoch. It is possible for us to be much better acquainted with God than it was for Enoch. God, "in these last days," has revealed Himself to us in the person of His own incarnate Son, who has dwelt among us, spoken to us, and brought life and immortality clearly to light by His Gospel. And so the faith which is now required is faith in Jesus Christ.

The truth for us, then, is that it is only a Christian who can please God; it is only the one who is in fellowship with God through Jesus Christ. "They that are in the flesh cannot please God." That is to say, those who have not been spiritually enlightened to know

God as He is seen in Jesus Christ cannot please Him. Such do not know Him as He has now been pleased to reveal Himself, and so cannot walk with Him as Enoch did.

Those who please God are those who perform all their good deeds and render all their Christian service as persons trusting alone in the merit of Jesus Christ for their salvation. They do not perform supposed good works in order to expiate their sins or win for themselves eternal life. These blessings they already have in Jesus Christ; and so in all their endeavours, their desire is to honour and serve Him who has redeemed them with His precious blood, and to whom they now rightfully belong.

Those who in every age have pleased God, have done it in the same way—by faith in God as revealed to them in the time in which they have lived. In this remarkable eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, we have a long list of men and women who in their generation greatly pleased God by the deeds which they performed. And in every case it is distinctly stated that it was "by faith" they did it. By faith Abel offered his sacrifice: by faith Noah built the ark; by faith Abraham entered the promised land; by faith Sarah bore the promised son; by faith Abraham offered that son on the altar; by faith the parents of Moses hid him three months; by faith Moses

refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; by faith he chose affliction with the people of God; by faith he observed the Passover and the Sprinkling of Blood; by faith he and the people passed through the Red Sea; by faith the people shouted down the walls of Jericho. And what shall I say more? For the time would fail to tell of all the deeds well-pleasing to God because of the faith actuating those who performed them.

Deeds are pleasing to God just in proportion to the faith of those by whom they are done. It is the faith, of which the deeds are the manifestation, which rejoices the heart of God. It was so in the case of Jesus when He was here on earth. The occasions on which He was specially delighted were those when something was done or said which manifested great faith in Him. It was such an occasion when to the Syro-Phoenician woman He said, "O woman, great is thy faith"; and when of the Roman Centurion He said, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." And on the other hand, nothing displeased Him so much as lack of faith on the part of His followers, "O ye of little faith!" was an exclamation often on His lips as one of reproach to His disciples.

(2) Another question which we may ask is, *What effect will pleasing God have on ourselves?* This is a

question, which, I think, in the case of every Christian can only receive one answer. Every Christian will, from his own experience, declare that his times of greatest happiness have been when he was seeking to please God. And the things of which he can even to-day think with comfort are those alone which were done to honour God and advance His cause. And the purer his motives have been in the doing of them the greater is his joy.

The happiest life on earth is the one spent in trying to please Jesus. And, on the contrary, the things we have done which we know have not been pleasing to Him are the sources of our real sorrow. Pleasing Jesus is the way to live happily and to die triumphantly.

(3) And lastly, let us ask, *What will God do in the case of those who please Him?* He will reward them both here and hereafter. He will not leave them without testimony, even in this life, to the satisfaction He feels. Even Jesus, in His earthly life, had experience of this truth. "The Father," He said, "hath not left me alone, for I do always those things which please Him" (John viii. 29). There is an inward joy and peace which belongs alone to those who seek to please God. "The Spirit Himself beareth witness with their spirit that they are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). And Solomon says, "When

a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him" (Prov. xvi. 7).

Whatever may be the testimony received on earth, great will be the reward in Heaven. "He will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off (Is. lvi. 5). Jesus Himself will say: "Inasmuch as ye did it unto My brethren, and because they were My brethren, ye did it unto Me—ye did it to please Me; therefore come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you."

VII

THE RAINBOW GRACES

" Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ; and to virtue, knowledge ; and to knowledge, temperance ; and to temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness ; and to godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore, the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure : for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall ; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ " (2 Peter i. 5-11).

" Adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue ; and in your virtue, knowledge ; and in your knowledge, temperance ; and in your temperance, patience ; and in your patience, godliness ; and in your godliness, love of the brethren ; and in your love of the brethren, love. For if these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he that lacketh these things is blind, seeing only what is near, having forgotten the cleansing from his old sins. Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure ; for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble ; for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ " (2 Peter i. 5-11, R.V.).

THE RAINBOW GRACES

2 PETER I. 5-11

THIS is a large text, but it is exceedingly compact, and its meaning and force are best perceived by viewing it as a whole. It consists of two parts. First, there are certain things to be done ; and second, there are certain encouragements to the doing of them. There are seven things to be done, and there are four encouragements to the doing of them.

The seven things to be done are embraced under the head of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and charity. And I would have you observe that " faith " is not one of these. It is " Giving all diligence *add to your faith.*" Faith is presupposed. The Apostle takes for granted that those whom he addresses have already believed, that they are all " children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."

Now, the Apostle says to these Christians, " Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge," and so on. But unfortunately his meaning is not clearly

expressed in our authorised translation. You might suppose, as some have done, that these seven things are brought together without the observance of any particular order; that as far as the sense is concerned, it is immaterial which is placed first and which last; that these graces of the Christian character are just all to be cultivated, and that the Apostle noted them down in the order in which they happened to occur to his own mind. You will, however, presently see that this is not so, and that they could not have been properly placed in any other order than that which they here occupy.

The Apostle's meaning is much more correctly given in our Revised Version: "Adding on your part all diligence, in your faith supply virtue; and in your virtue, knowledge; and in your knowledge, temperance; and in your temperance, patience; and in your patience, godliness; and in your godliness, love of the brethren; and in your love of the brethren, love." These are, as it were, the seven prismatic colours of the Christian character, blending in perfect harmony, and forming together the beautiful rainbow of the Christian's life in God.

I

BUT though they thus blend and form a beautiful and symmetrical whole, we may briefly CONSIDER THEM IN THEIR INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER.

(1) And first, "In your faith supply *virtue*," or, "In your faith let there be a supply of virtue."

The term "virtue" is not here employed in the sense which it usually has among us, as when we speak of a virtuous person. By the term we usually mean moral excellence of whatever kind, and employed in this sense it would include all the seven things here enumerated. Here it has a more restricted application. It means energy, power, or efficaciousness. We often employ it in this sense. We speak of there being virtue in a medicine to cure a particular disease. We also talk of one thing happening in virtue of another, *i.e.*, the one is the cause of the other, the power which produces the other. And the term is often used with this meaning in Scripture. Thus, in the case of the woman who came secretly among the crowd and touched the hem of Jesus' garment, it is said Jesus knew that virtue had gone out of Him. That is to say, Jesus was conscious of having put forth an efficacious power to heal the woman. And on another occasion, when Jesus came down from the mount where He had all night been engaged in prayer, we are told, "the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for there went virtue out of Him and healed them all."

When the Apostle, therefore, says, "In your faith let there be a supply of virtue," his meaning is that faith must not be a dormant, inactive thing. It must

be a living, active principle in the soul, manifesting itself in the forth-putting of an efficacious power. It means, in other words, that "faith without works is dead, being alone." If a man have real faith in Jesus, he must be a real power for good in the world; virtue must go forth from him to heal and help his fellow-men. He must dare and do for Him in whom he believes.

The examples of men whose faith had in it an abundant supply of this element of virtue have been numerous in all ages of the Church. The noble martyrs of God in every land were men whose faith was charged with it. It was the possession of this quality in a pre-eminent degree which shed such a halo of glory round their lives.

But, perhaps, the noblest example of it which is anywhere to be found on record is given us in the life of the Apostle Paul. Noble courage, heroic daring, burning zeal in the service of Him whom he loved and in whom he trusted amounted in his case to a very enthusiasm. Other saints may have surpassed Paul in many things, but by none has he been equalled in zeal and elastic energy. "In labours more abundant." Plunged into depths of tribulation owing to his fidelity to the cause of Christ, his zeal only burned the brighter. "Stripes above measure," "imprisonments frequent," "deaths oft," these but acted as incentives to his

Christian valour. "In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of his own countrymen, in perils of the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings, in cold and nakedness."

Did these dispirit him, daunt his courage, or make his faith to fail? Nay, in all this he gloried. His was a zeal which many waters could not quench; which prison walls and feet fast in the stocks could not subdue; which the menaces of an infuriated mob could not affright; and which all the grandeur of Cæsar's judgment-hall could not appal. In his faith there was an abounding supply of virtue, of efficacious power, of an enthusiastic determination to spend and be spent in the service of Christ. He was not unaware that bonds and afflictions awaited him, but he declares "none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy." Many of his dearest friends besought him, with tears in their eyes, not to expose himself to the fury of his enemies. But his whole soul, being in a blaze of holy ardour, he impatiently exclaims, "What mean ye to weep and break my heart, for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

What a withering rebuke does the example of this great Apostle administer to time-serving men of the present generation, who cover the deepest cowardice or the most sluggish indolence under the name of expediency or caution! Were Paul alive now, how he would denounce with words of fire, those who profess to believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but are destitute of the grace of virtue! O for a Paul to stir up a sleeping Church and bid her gird herself to fight the battles of the Lord and to do valiantly in the name of Jesus!

"In your faith supply virtue."

(2) But, then, there is danger to be guarded against in this matter. There is danger lest this zeal should be misdirected; lest it should be employed in the accomplishment of a wrong object, or lest it should adopt wrong means to attain even a good object. There is danger too of zeal becoming a wild fanaticism. Hence, *virtue must have in it a supply of knowledge.* The Christian possessing zeal, but without knowledge to guide it, is like a ship without a pilot in danger of splitting on the rocks. We are in danger of making our impulsive feelings the standard of our duty. There are some who will tell you that if a man's intention be good, it matters little if he should be in error. This is a great mistake. I doubt not the Roman Catholic who performs a journey on his bare and bleeding knees round some holy well to atone for his sins has a good

intention and a zeal for God. The Jews of old had a zeal for God, but it was not according to knowledge. It filled them with a frenzy which led them to cry, regarding the Son of God, "Away with Him! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

The error, however, it is to be carefully observed, is not in having an enthusiastic zeal for the glory of God. The mistake is in not knowing what is really for the glory of God. Paul was constitutionally an earnest and whole-hearted man, in whatever cause he undertook. The zeal which led Saul of Tarsus to persecute from city to city those who called on the name of the Lord Jesus was just as intense as that which led him afterwards, when he had become the great Apostle of the Gentiles, to exclaim, "I am ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus." In the former case, however, his zeal was without knowledge. He did it, as he himself said, "in ignorance."

First make sure that what you would do is in accordance with the will of God, is in harmony with His law and testimony; and, then, "whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

"In your virtue supply knowledge."

(3) But then, "knowledge puffeth up." It has a tendency to foster a spirit of self-sufficiency, and to lead us to become proud, boastful, self-confident. We begin to think our wisdom will preserve us from

all danger and enable us to overcome all temptation. We forget that the flesh is strong, that the world is alluring, and that the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour. We forget that the Christian life is a struggle, and that it is no easy matter to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. And so the Apostle says, "*In your knowledge let there be a supply of temperance,*" *i.e.*, of self-control. Let there be a crucifixion of the flesh; a keeping of the body under; a control of all evil passions, whether of the temper, of the appetite, or of the tongue. You must not only know what to do, but have firmness and determination to do it. Solomon had wisdom but he lacked temperance. He who would gain the mastery must be temperate in all things. He must endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Difficulties will stand in the Christian's way, and no matter how great his knowledge may be, the Hill Difficulty must be climbed on his knees. He may often have to prostrate himself before the throne of the heavenly grace, crying for help. There may even have to be "strong crying and tears."

"In your knowledge supply temperance."

(4) And *temperance needs to have in it a supply of patience*, for the mortification of the flesh is not completed in a day. The contest between the flesh and the spirit may be long and severe. Patience is

necessary to enable the Christian to persevere in the onward upward way.

" In your temperance supply patience."

(5) But then, there is danger of patience becoming dogged indifference. There are some who say, what happens will happen, and we cannot help it ; we must just bear it. But the Christian believes in something above a blind fatalism. He recognises a wise and righteous Providence guiding all events toward a beneficent end. And so, *patience must have in it a supply of godliness.*

Godliness is just recognising the hand of God in everything, and viewing everything in relation to God. Do we suffer affliction ? We regard it as a chastisement sent by God to purify us from the dross of sin ; or a discipline to advance us to a higher spiritual condition. Do we meet with losses in our business ? We hear God saying to us, " Lay up treasure in heaven, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Do we meet with prosperity ? It is not merely our " good luck," but the goodness of our God, and to Him we give the thanks. The Christian desires to walk with God, and as he passes through the world to hear " all things whispering God is here."

" In your patience supply godliness."

(6) But godliness itself is liable to abuse, and has been sadly abused by many. Under pretence of

godliness, persons have retired from the world with all its responsibilities and duties, and have shut themselves up in a monastic cell. It is our duty and privilege to commune with God and to view everything in relation to God, but we must remember we have duties towards our fellow-Christians. We have to comfort them in their troubles; to counsel them in their difficulties; to rejoice with them in their joys, and to join them in their works of faith and labours of love. *Godliness must have in it a supply of brotherly kindness.* We have duties which cannot be performed in a monastic dungeon. Godliness is not selfish; but is full of the spirit of the good Samaritan.

"In your godliness supply love of the brethren."

(7) But there is a danger against which even love of the brethren needs to be guarded. It may become a narrow sectarianism. For while there are special duties which we owe to our brethren of the same faith and worship, there are duties which we owe to the world at large—to our brethren of mankind. The Apostle Paul says, "Let us do good unto all men as we have opportunity." Our kindness must be wide as the human race. And so our text says, "*In your love of the brethren let there be a supply of love.*" There is no danger of excess here. Our sympathies cannot be too comprehensive. And so this is the crowning grace of the Christian life. This is the pinnacle of that pyramid

whose base rests on the faith which is in Christ Jesus. It is "the Shekinah in the temple of Christian character."

Is it not manifest that these seven Christian graces are not strung together at random; that on the contrary they dovetail into each other, the influence of each being felt on all the others; and that if one of them were wanting the unity would be broken and the symmetry destroyed. If one of the seven prismatic colours were wanting there would be no glorious rainbow arching the heavens. If one wheel were missing from the mechanism of the watch there would be no measuring of the moments as they pass.

And so were one of these seven ingredients wanting in the life of the Christian, his character would be deformed; his conduct would present a mass of inconsistencies; and we should fail to behold the doctrine of God adorned in all things by a walk and conversation becoming the Gospel of Christ. Then, brethren, give all diligence; use all earnestness to have in your faith a supply of virtue, and in virtue knowledge, and in knowledge temperance, and in temperance patience, and in patience godliness, and in godliness love of the brethren, and in love of the brethren love to all mankind.

II

Let us now notice the four encouragements to the cultivation of these seven graces.

The first is mentioned in the eighth verse: "If these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ"; or more clearly in the Revised Version, "If these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This is just a repetition of the truth taught by Christ Himself when He said, "If any man will *do* His will, he shall *know* of the doctrine, whether it be of God" (John vii. 17). *Do* and you will *know*. Some think if they knew more they would do better. But the reverse is true. If we did better we should know more—more about Christ and His Salvation. It is only the man whose mind and heart are bent in the direction of serving God who will have any real desire to know Him.

It must be understood, however, that by "the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" is meant not merely a knowledge of doctrines concerning Him, but an experimental acquaintance with Him in His power to save, to strengthen, to keep and to comfort. And it is in this knowledge that progress can alone be made by the cultivation of the all-round obedience of

these seven blending graces. A man who is led by his own depraved appetites, buried in worldliness, or absorbed in selfish pursuits cannot, owing to the bent of his mind, make progress in apprehending the wonders of Christ's redemption, and in knowing the power of His resurrection life. Christianity is not a theory but a life. It is Christ living in the soul. As Paul said, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

(2) But in order to the realization of the result here described these graces must not merely be in us in an elemental condition; they must abound. "If these things are yours and *abound*, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." There is life, and life "more abundant." There is character of "wood, hay, and stubble"; and there is character of "gold, silver, and precious stones" (1 Cor. iii. 12). There is babyhood in Christ, and there is full grown manhood. And it is to the abounding, golden-graced, and fully developed Christian life, that there comes the deep, joyous, soul-satisfying experience of Christ and His salvation.

2. ~~(2)~~ A second encouragement is given in the ninth verse: "He that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins."

A Christian deficient in the graces of the Christian character is near-sighted. He is comparatively blind.

He has no clear view of his interest in Christ, and of his hope for the future. He cannot look back to the time when he first consciously trusted in Christ and realized that for His sake all his sins were forgiven, and when his heart was full of gladness. And when he looks toward the future he cannot see the land that is very far off and the King in His beauty, and rejoice that that land is his. He has forgotten that he was purged from his old sins because these have still such a hold in his nature. He has a little light in his soul, but it is only a glimmering. He is, it may be, a Christian, but a dull, cheerless, desponding Christian.

This is the encouragement stated negatively. Stated positively it is that the Christian, abounding in the blending harmonies of the Christian character, still enjoys the sense of that forgiveness which became his when first he trusted Christ as his Saviour, and when Christ said to him in the promise of the Gospel, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." And he is able to look into the future without fear. He can from day to day enjoy Pisgah views of the promised land and have in his heart the assured confidence that one day he shall walk the golden streets of the New Jerusalem.

It is only the progressive Christian; the Christian who is daily growing in likeness to Christ, who retains the knowledge of sins forgiven and who is able continuously to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. It is only

he can look back and luxuriate in the memory of all God's gracious dealings with him in the past, and look afar with glad expectation to the high destinies of the future.

Brethren, seek to be far-sighted Christians, able to look behind and before, and not to fear. And remember that in order to this you must perfect in your character the seven-fold fruit of faith.

(3) But there is still another encouragement to use all diligence in perfecting this train of Christian graces. It is that by so doing *we shall be making our calling and election sure.* "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never stumble" (verse 10).

It is here implied that stumbling Christians are never assured Christians. If we would have the assurance of our salvation the work of salvation must be going forward day by day in our character and conduct; we must be living the consecrated life; we must, in a word, have our fruit unto holiness. There can be no assurance of pardon and heaven when there is ever and anon a falling into sin, or when there is a gradual backsliding, or when the life is full of inconsistencies. In such circumstances there must not only be doubts and misgivings, but there ought to be positive fears that we are strangers to grace and to God.

It is quite true that any conduct on our part cannot

make our final salvation, in itself, any more secure than it is. If our names be registered in the Book of Life, our calling and election are absolutely certain. But God has not permitted any of us to gaze upon that record; nor have we any reason to believe that He will make known its contents to us by visions or dreams or momentary feelings. And yet it is possible for the Christian to have the assurance for himself that he is Christ's and that heaven is to be his eternal home. If it were not so the Apostle would not urge us, as he does here, "to make our calling and election sure."

How, then, is this assurance to be obtained? Our text tells us. It is by giving diligence to increase in our faith virtue, and in virtue knowledge, and in knowledge temperance, and in temperance patience, and in patience godliness, and in godliness brotherly kindness, and in brotherly kindness love.

What would you not give to know assuredly that there is a mansion awaiting you in heaven, that your crown of glory is prepared? If assured of this how happy would be your life! You could say, Come weal or woe in this world; come prosperity or adversity, heaven is my fatherland. Your journey through this world would be a triumphal march to glory.

> Should storms of wrath shake earth and sea,
> Your mind has heaven and peace within.

Then, Christian, if you would thus begin heaven on

earth, climb the mount of communion; soar high in virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and love. These are the seven hills on which the eternal city of your assurance must be built.

(4) But to crown all, give diligence to excel in these seven blending graces of the Christian character, "for so *an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*"

Every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ will get an entrance into the eternal kingdom, but every believer will not get an abundant entrance. Many a ship gets into port which does not enter under full sail, canvas filled with favouring breezes, top-mast flag unfurled, and music-playing. Many a vessel enters harbour dismasted and almost sinking.

The Apostle had probably before his mind the spectacle of a triumph given to some Roman General who had performed a signal service to the State. On such an occasion all the citizens went forth to meet him. The gates of the city were flung open to receive him. Music resounded on every side. And the hero, having a crown held above his head, was drawn inside the city on a triumphal car. And so the Apostle seems to say that the Christian warrior's entrance into heaven will be a grand triumph. Angels will descend

to bear him on high to the throne prepared for him. All heaven will rejoice. The gates of glory will be flung wide to receive him, and his will be a place near the throne of the Eternal, where he will shine as a star for ever and ever.

Let us then fight the good fight of faith; seek to finish our course with joy; live the strenuous upward life; and so an entrance shall be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom.

VIII

THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY TO THE CHURCH

" Remember the Lord afar off, and let Jerusalem come into your mind " (Jer. li. 50).

THE CHRISTIAN'S DUTY TO THE CHURCH

JEREMIAH LI. 50

IN their primary application these words had reference to the Jews in their Babylonian Captivity. At the time to which they refer, the Holy City, Jerusalem, was in ruins, and the temple and its services deserted. But the prophet was commissioned to encourage the people with the promise that a better time was coming, when their enemies would be overthrown and they themselves set free. "Therefore," says the prophet, "do not forget Jerusalem; let it ever be fresh in your minds; let your desires ever be toward it; and let there be a preparedness to start on the homeward journey whenever God in His providence may open the way. Remember the Lord, though you be now far off from the place of His manifested glory; and let Jerusalem dwell in your mind, though it be not yet your privilege to enter its gates."

Such is the literal and immediate interpretation of the text. But in the mind and thought of a Christian,

Jerusalem stands for the Church of God on earth and in Heaven. There is Jerusalem which has come down from God out of Heaven—the spiritual Jerusalem or visible Kingdom of God on earth; in other words, the Christian Church. This is the Jerusalem which is free and which is the mother of us all. And, then, there is Jerusalem which is above, and which, for the present, remains above—the City which Abraham sought, and which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; in other words, Heaven itself.

Jerusalem, then, in the language of a Christian, is the Church of God, either militant on earth, or triumphant in Heaven. On the present occasion we shall regard it in both these aspects.

I

LET us, first, think of it as THE CHURCH ON EARTH. This is your Jerusalem, and in the language of our text, God would say to you, "Let it come into your mind."

(1) *Let it come into your mind to join its fellowship*, if you have not already done so. It is the duty of every Christian to be a member of the visible Church. The Christian is not only a "believer," but a "confessor." He believes and is baptised. He believes with the heart and confesses with the mouth. He trusts in

Christ as his priest, and submits to Christ as his King.

It is the duty of Christian parents to introduce their infant children into the membership of this visible Church, and to bring them up within it. And it is the duty of these children when they come to years of understanding not to discard their membership, but to ratify and endorse it by taking their place at the Holy Table.

This is not a matter of indifference. And if any of you whom I address be at present outside the full fellowship of the Church, I would venture to ask, why it does not come into your mind to join it? Are you *ashamed to occupy a position which implies a profession of piety?* Then, that means you are ashamed of Christ. And you know He has said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My *words*, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels" (Luke ix. 26). By Christ's "words" we are to understand His commands; just as the ten commandments are called "the ten words" (Deut. x. 4). And one of His commands is, "This do in remembrance of Me." Or is it because *you have "simply neglected" it,* as some express it? Then it is Christ you are treating with neglect; and that is surely not a "simple" matter. To despise His laws cannot be regarded as a sign of

love and appreciation. "If ye love me," He said, "Keep my commandments." To treat His ordinance with indifference is to treat Himself with contempt. Or, is it that *you think you can be in the invisible Church though you never join the visible?* And suppose we grant this, what then? You are satisfied to be in His House in a state of concealment. This is assuredly not the manner of a *bona fide* member of a household. You are satisfied to be in the house but not in the family. O that such an unworthy thought should occupy the mind of any one bearing the Christian name!

May the real reason not be, that it has not yet come into your mind to really join yourself to Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour? Only let Jesus Christ, the King of New Jerusalem, come into your mind, and let His love possess your heart, and you will be constrained to join His visible Kingdom. You will rejoice in the privilege of doing so.

(2) In the next place, *Let it come into your mind to pray for it.* "Pray that Jerusalem may have peace and felicity," is language which a Christian will not put aside as having no application to him. Every time you pray, whether in private, at the family altar, or in the public assembly, let Jerusalem come into your mind.

Jesus has put Jerusalem almost at the very beginning

fo the disciples' prayer. The very second petition is, "Thy Kingdom come."

There is a very beautiful idea in Psalm lxxii. 15: "He shall live, and to Him shall be given of the gold of Sheba; prayer also shall be made for Him continually; and duly shall He be praised." This is a description of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, the King that reigns in New Jerusalem. And mark you, it said, "Prayer shall be made *for* Him." Prayer for Jesus Christ! Prayer for Jesus Christ continually! When you pray for His Kingdom, for the spread of His truth, for the honouring of His name, for the extension of His cause in the world, you pray for Him. "Prayer shall be made for Him continually!"

Then, brethren, pray more for Christ's Church, for her ministers and members, for her children, for her workers of every rank. I know a minister who was one day greatly refreshed by what a woman, a member of his congregation, told him. She was telling him how her husband had commenced family worship, and she added, "And he prays for you every night." I sometimes think that if we ministers had more people praying for us, we should be more successful in our work. Ministers, I think, might often adopt the language of an American pastor who said to his people, "I cannot get on with you now as I used to do, as I have lost my prayer-book." A praying people are

a minister's prayer-book. They make both his praying and his preaching easy.

Let Jerusalem come into your mind when you pray—the Jerusalem around your own door, and also the Jerusalem which is more remote.

(3) In the third place, *let it come into your mind to work for it.* If a man really prays for Jerusalem he *will* work for it. The child of God says, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," and then adds, "Because of the House of the Lord our God, *I will seek thy good*" (Ps. cxxii. 6, 9).

What is wanted is more of the spirit of the writer of the 137th Psalm, when he says, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

Here is each one speaking for himself, and imprecating a curse upon himself if he should ever be so base as to forget the House of his God, if he should ever fail to place its interests before every other on earth. And if a Jew had these feelings in reference to the City of his solemnities, what should be those of a Christian in reference to Christ's Church, and in reference to whatever pertains to His worship and service!

If you have time, or talents, or influence, or means,

let Jerusalem come into your mind, and see whether you cannot help its prosperity, and whether you ought not to do so.

II

Now let us regard Jerusalem as THE CHURCH ABOVE, IN HEAVEN.

(1) And first of all, *let it come into your mind to think much about Heaven.* It is a real place and a happy place. This much, according to the teaching of Holy Scripture, is clear. God's presence and glory are specially manifested there. Jesus in His glorified humanity is there. The angels are there. The spirits of just men made perfect are there. Abel, and Enoch, and Abraham, and Moses, and Elijah, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah (who wrote the book from which our text is taken), and Daniel are there. The Apostles are there. The martyrs are there. Many of your loved friends are there. You hope to be there. You may soon be there. Then, surely, this place and all things there ought to be much in your thoughts. But are they? How many speak and act as if these things had no existence! As if men were to be here for ever; and as if every object for which they live were here and nothing hereafter!

But what does the Apostle Paul say on this point? He says, "Seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your

affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. iii. 1, 2). There are "things above," just as there are "things on the earth." And says the Apostle, "Seek them, set your affections on them. Let them ever be in your mind." And if we really believed the Bible this is surely what we would do.

Brethren, believe in Heaven and in all things that are there. Let Jerusalem above come into your mind and let not the shadowy and unsatisfying things of earth engross your every thought and attention.

(2) *Let Jerusalem come into your mind in times of prosperity.* When everything goes well with us here, we are liable to set our hearts on what we have, and to forget the things for which we hope. This is one of the special dangers of prosperity. And hence the special need at such times to attend to the injunction of our text. It is well at all times to remember that the things which we see and possess are temporal, but that the things which we see not yet are eternal. A gentleman showed a Christian friend over his extensive estate. From an elevated position he pointed north, south, east and west, and said, "All this is mine." The friend listened to his description of all his possessions, and then, pointing upward with his finger, he said, "And what have you got up there?" The miserly rich man had got nothing up there. The eldest son of a Duke of Hamilton was in a better position than that.

Calling his younger brother to his dying bed-side, he said, "In a short time you will be a duke, but I shall then be a king!" Yes, in the Jerusalem above there shall be kings and priests who shall reign for ever and ever. Earthly possessions are a sorry substitute for the heavenly inheritance. In your times of highest prosperity, let the Jerusalem which is above come into your mind.

(3) *Let Jerusalem especially come into your mind in times of adversity.* If yours be a hard lot in life with many difficulties, sorrows and troubles, let Jerusalem come into your mind. You may be a Lazarus now and a king hereafter. In the Jerusalem above your place may be beside faithful Abraham, or zealous Paul, or loving John. "She has poor clothes but she is a king's daughter," said two pious sisters to their gay and aristocratic young brother, when he came into the drawing-room and seemed surprised to find them talking to a poor old woman.

(4) *Let Jerusalem come into your mind in times of temptation.* You are tempted, it may be, to gain some worldly advantage by some dishonourable or dishonest act; or, you are tempted to gratify some sinful passion. At such a time let Jerusalem come into your mind. Think of how the thing will be regarded there; of how you yourself will regard it when you arrive there; and of what an eternal loss

it may be to you when you reach that happy place.

But are there some of you who fear that you do not yet possess a title to the Jerusalem above? And if so, are you satisfied to remain thus? Think of what it means. Among much else, it means you shall never again meet your loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus. They are gone to that happy land, and as they left you, they bade you meet them there. And, it may be, that with tears in your eyes you promised them that you would. But you have never yet turned your face toward that homeland.

"O but," say some, "hell may not be eternal." Yes, they say that there may be a second chance; that after a lengthened period of purification by suffering they may be admitted to Heaven, and that thus all may be saved at last." And if it were so, are you satisfied to go there, through a purgatorial hell? What fools men are to think of going to Heaven round by hell; especially when there is a direct way to Heaven!

What is this direct way? you ask, It is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." Receive the pardon of your sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. The moment you by faith take Jesus Christ as your Saviour, all your sins are blotted out; yours is a full absolution. And then

receive purity through the gracious working of the Holy Spirit in your heart. You need both pardon and purity; pardon is not enough. "Ye must be born again." A heavenly nature is necessary to the enjoyment of the heavenly land. If you were transferred to Heaven without a heavenly nature, it would not be Heaven to you; and you would pollute the place. Heaven is not so much a place as a condition. A father told his children the story of "The Babes in the Wood." "And where did the babes go when they died," asked the children. "To Heaven," said the father. "And where did the uncle go?" was the next question of the children. The father, not well knowing what he should reply, answered, "To Heaven." "O," exclaimed the children, "he'll kill them again!" And so he would. If you would spend eternity in Heaven you *must* be born again.

It is said the Jews, whose longings are still toward their own Holy Land, are in the habit of closing their day of atonement with the shout, "When next year comes may we all be in Jerusalem!" Let us close with this sentiment in our heart: "When a few more years have passed may we all be in Jerusalem above."

IX

FIRST THINGS FIRST

" Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you " (Matt. vi. 33).

" Seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you " (Matt. vi. 33, R.V.).

FIRST THINGS FIRST

MATT. vi. 33

THESE are words of the Master, addressed to His disciples, embodying an essential principle of our religion.

The text consists of two parts— a commanded *duty* and a comforting *promise*. The duty is, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness"; and the promise, "All these things shall be added unto you."

I

LET us first consider THE DUTY: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness."

Two primary questions have reference to the subject which is to engage our attention: the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness. What is meant by the Kingdom of God? And what is meant by His righteousness?

(1) In the first place, then, *What is meant by the Kingdom of God?* "The Kingdom of God" is a phrase familiar to the reader of the New Testament.

It is used interchangeably with another, namely, "The Kingdom of Heaven." The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven mean the same thing.

When the Baptist performed his mission the burden of all his sermons was, "Repent ye; for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. iii. 2). And when he was set aside and Jesus entered on His ministry, He began by saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the Gospel" (Mark i. 15). According to this teaching of the Baptist and of Jesus Himself the entrance into the Kingdom of God is by repentance and faith.

Then we remember Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John iii. 3). We are thus taught that the way unto the Kingdom of God is by the new birth.

Again, when the Pharisees enquired when the Kingdom of God should come, Jesus replied, "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation. . . for lo, the Kingdom of God is within you" (Luke xvii. 20). The Kingdom of God is set up in men's hearts. It is a reign of God in the inward part.

Still further the Apostle Paul says, "The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. xiv. 17). It is not what a man eats or drinks which constitutes him a member of the Kingdom of God, but the

possession of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Then, we know that most of our Lord's parables were spoken to make known to His disciples the mysteries of His Kingdom. "The kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field, but while men slept his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat." "The field is the world. The good seed are the children of the Kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one" (Matt. xiii. 24 and 38). From this we learn that the members of this Kingdom are mixed with the wicked and unbelieving in the world: They live together in the same general society.

Again, "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matt. xiii. 31). This teaches that the Kingdom is small at first, but grows. Small at first in a man's heart, it grows. Small at first in the world, it grows until it fills the whole earth.

Again, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matt. xiii. 33). The Kingdom grows by its contact with the world. Its

principles are embodied in the lives of men, and these by contact with the world are the means of bringing others under the influence of the same principles.

It is about this Kingdom we pray in the disciples' prayer. "Our Father which art in Heaven . . . Thy Kingdom come" (Matt. vi. 9). And as we have been taught, when we offer this petition, "we pray that Satan's Kingdom may be destroyed; that the Kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it; and that the Kingdom of glory may be hastened."

From all this we learn that this Kingdom is a spiritual dominion set up in the soul. It is at first inward, and then manifests itself outwardly. It is a new life; a life of repentance; a life of faith; a growing life, advancing more and more until it becomes the perfect life of heaven. The practical question is, Has it been set up in your soul? For let it be specially noted that this Kingdom of Heaven is not heaven. It is begun here and now. If you have been born of God, and if you are living a life of faith on the Son of God, this Kingdom is within you, and you are within it: it is expressed in both ways. Are you in it? And are you seeking to advance it in yourself and in the world?

(2) So much for the meaning of the Kingdom of God. And now, *what is meant by His righteousness?*

Well, it is God's righteousness: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness." What is meant, then, by God's righteousness?

In some parts of Scripture it means the righteousness wrought out for us by Jesus Christ and which is unto all and upon all them that believe on Him. It is described as "the righteousness of God without the law" which is "reckoned" to all that believe. In other words it is the work done for us by the Son of God—done for us in His life and in His death. It is called the righteousness of God, because devised by God, wrought out by God manifest in the flesh, and imputed by God to all who believe on His Son. This, however, I apprehend is not its meaning in our text. If we consider some other parts of this Sermon on the Mount where the term occurs I think we shall see its meaning. For example in the fifth chapter and twentieth verse, it is said, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of heaven." Here, as the context shows, it means "doing" and "teaching" the Commandments of God. Then in the tenth verse of the same chapter, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Here it means having the character and doing the works of God's children: in other words, doing right. The exhortation of our text is, I believe,

the same as that of the last verse of the fifth chapter: "Be ye, therefore, perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." This verse means, Seek ye God's perfection; and in harmony with it, our text says, Seek ye God's righteousness. God's righteousness in our text is the same as that righteousness of which the Apostle Paul speaks when he says, "The kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is the character which belongs to God's children. It is holiness, purity, goodness. We have nowhere a better description of it than in the opening sentences of this matchless Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed," says Jesus, "are the poor in spirit. . . Blessed are they that mourn. . . . Blessed are the meek. . . Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness . . . Blessed are the merciful . . . Blessed are the pure in heart. . . Blessed are the peacemakers."

Jesus has taught us that one chief element in this righteousness is humility and childlike faith. His disciples once put to Him the question, "Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?" And taking a little child and setting him in the midst of them, He said, "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. xviii. 1).

But this righteousness is not all inward. Jesus has

taught us that an essential part of it is faithful works done in God's service. "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard." And when he found men standing idle in the market place he said, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" (Matt. xx. 1).

From all this, then, I think, we ought to have a tolerably clear idea as to what is meant by "the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." To be in God's Kingdom, or to have God's Kingdom in us, is to be true Christians. And to have God's righteousness is to be like God, and to have the image lost in Adam restored.

(3) Now, our text says, "SEEK ye the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." There is a word here for each of us. Are we outside this Kingdom? Jesus says to us, "Seek to be in it." Are we in it? He says to us, "Seek more of its righteousness." He says to Christians, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." "Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect." "Put ye on the Lord Jesus." "Be ye changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

But our duty in this matter is not fully set forth by the word "Seek." It is "seek ye first." The emphatic word is this word "first." It means that we

should give the highest place to the Kingdom of God and His righteousness; that we should place it before everything else; that we should put it before "these things" mentioned in the second clause of the text.

What are we to understand by "these things"? What are they? Well, they are the things of which the Saviour has just been speaking. What are they? In verse 19, they are "treasures upon earth"—whatever of this world men esteem as treasures: wealth, honour, distinction. In verse 25, they are "What ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or for your body, what ye shall put on": food and raiment. Men are naturally greatly concerned about these things: are often wholly absorbed in mind and thought concerning them. But Jesus here says, "Religion first! The kingdom of God and His righteousness first!" He does not mean that we are not to work, attend to our daily business, and make provision for our families. On the contrary, his religion teaches that "if any will not work neither should he eat." And, "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." But Jesus means that we ought not to be troubled or anxious about the future; and that we ought not to set our hearts on earthly possessions. Religion ought to be first: the Kingdom of God first: God's cause first: holiness first.

If we look at the verses preceding our text we shall discover abundant reasons for keeping the things of this world in a very subordinate position.

From verse 19 we learn that *they are not abiding*. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." Any day we may lose them. They may leave us, or we may be called upon to leave them. The man in the parable said, "This will I do, I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits, and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But what said God? "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luke xii. 18).

From verse 22 we learn that if unduly sought after *they darken the soul's vision*. "The lamp of the body is the eye: if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." By the eye Jesus means the eye of the mind. By the single eye He means a good eye which looks straight at its object and sees things as they are. And by the evil eye He means an eye which looks at everything askance. The evil-eyed Christian, therefore, is one who instead of looking straight at God and all that

pertains to His spiritual Kingdom ever squints toward the things of the world. He seems to himself, and it may be to others, to be looking God-ward, but in reality his inclination is earth-ward. He is a worldly-minded Christian, and as a consequence has no clear and bright vision of things heavenly.

From verse 24, we learn that, if the things of the world are not kept under our feet, *they become our master.* "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon," says Jesus. But this is the very thing many are trying to do. It would not be true to say that they have not a certain interest in religion, but the world is their master. They come to the House of God, say their prayers, and occasionally read a chapter of the Bible, and in this way keep conscience quiet; but they are deceiving themselves, for their heart is in the world. They are as those in the days of Isaiah, of whom God said, "This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men" (Isaiah xxix. 13). Religion must have the first place, and dominate the whole life, else it is not true religion.

In harmony with the principle embodied in our text *religion should have the first place in every day, in every week, of the whole life.* A day begun with God is well begun. The time given to prayer and meditation on the Word of God, in the morning, before going forth to the business of the day, is not time lost. Before looking on the face of our fellow-men it is well to look into the face of God. Getting into sympathy with heaven at the start will help us to overcome the trials and temptations of the day, and to have God with us through all its hours.

Religion should have the first place in every week. God asks this; and in doing so He is seeking our spiritual good. He claims it for His special worship; and we ought not to grudge devoting the whole of it to this object. Alas! that so many *seem* to do so. They seem to think that if they make an appearance, for a brief period, in the sanctuary, they may spend the remainder of the day in the pursuit of their own worldly pleasures. For the Christian, "a Sabbath well spent is a week of content."

II

Now, let us briefly consider THE PRECIOUS PROMISE which attaches to the performance of the duty: "All these things shall be added unto you."

We have already seen what "these things" are.

They are what we shall eat and drink and wear—the necessaries of our physical life.

Jesus says, "Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." This should be enough to free us from all anxiety about the future. If He knows that we need them, we shall have them. If an earthly father, being evil, knows how to give good gifts to his children, much more our heavenly Father.

This is the truth taught by the analogy of nature all around us. See how God feeds the birds of the air. They do not worry about their future provision, and yet they are not forgotten by God. And Jesus says, "Are ye not much better than they?" Think you that the God who cares for the fowls of the air will neglect His children, made in His own image, and redeemed by the blood of His Son? And as for raiment, "Consider," says Jesus, "the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet, I say unto you, That Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore," yes, wherefore, "if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

Then, it must not be overlooked, that in our text Jesus has given the definite promise, "All these things shall be added unto you." And the form of

expression used implies that the fulfilment of this promise is but one of God's minor blessings. These things shall be "added" unto you; that is to say, they shall be thrown into the bargain. When you go to God for His good things—His Kingdom and righteousness—the things which you need for your earthly life will be thrown into the bargain. He who has bestowed the greater blessings will not withhold the lesser.

But it may be said there are, notwithstanding this promise, multitudes of people destitute of daily food, almost naked, and living in greatest misery. This is no doubt true, but are these persons who have complied with the condition attached to the promise? The promise of the text, like all the promises, is conditioned; the condition being that we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. A destitute person who has lived a life of alienation from God, despising His laws, and ignoring His claims, has no right to complain that God has not fulfilled to him this promise. The promise has not been made to such a one. Only comply with the condition and see whether God does not keep His word.

Here then is the principle by which we are to be guided, and by compliance with which we are to "stand" in the Christian life. The first things must always be first—God's Kingdom and righteousness

must ever have first place; and then the promise is sure that all our temporal wants will be supplied.

But there are various ways of standing in the Christian life. There are some who stand much better than others. There are some like the conjurer's wand; it does not fall, but you wonder that it does not. There are others who stand like a cedar in Lebanon; though its branches be tossed and torn by the winds of heaven, this only makes it strike its roots more deeply down and clasp more firmly the rocks amid which it grows. But they stand best of all who stand like the mountains which are round about Jerusalem. They stand without a tremor.

> They in the Lord that firmly trust
> Shall be like Sion hill,
> Which at no time can be removed,
> But standeth ever still.

X

THE CHURCH'S DUTY TO CHRIST'S POOR

" If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates, in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother " (Deuteronomy xv. 7).

THE CHURCH'S DUTY TO CHRIST'S POOR

DEUT. XV. 7

To pity the poor is one of the principal precepts of our religion. This has been so under both the Jewish and Christian dispensations of grace.

The whole duty of man is contained in one word—"Thou shalt love." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all Thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke x. 27). Thou shalt love God supremely; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. And who is my neighbour? He is the man who needs your help and whom it is in your power to aid. So Jesus taught in His parable of the Good Samaritan. Your neighbour is specially the man who has fallen by the way, and lies bruised and bleeding.

We owe the duty of love and helpfulness to all men, but are under a special obligation to those who are our "brethren"; that is, to those who are united with us

by the bonds of a common faith and a common worship. It is of these our text speaks. "A poor man, one of thy brethren." "Thy poor brother." The Church of God in both Old and New Testament times was intended to be a great brotherhood, the members being under obligations to fellow-members which did not apply to strangers, or outsiders. For example, we find from verse 3 of this chapter that the law of release, which applied to a fellow-Israelite, did not apply to a foreigner. "Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it (the loan); but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; to the end that there be no poor among you." And from Exodus xxii. 25, we find that an Israelite was not allowed to take usury (or interest) from a brother Israelite, though he might from a stranger. "Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury, that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to" (Deut. xxiii. 20). And it is in harmony with this we sing of the man who shall ascend into the hill of God—

> His coin puts not to usury,
> Nor take reward will he
> Against the guiltless. Who doth thus
> Shall never moved be.

The same principle we find in the New Testament. "As, therefore, we have opportunity," says the Apostle

Paul, "let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of the faith" (Gal. vi. 10).

This duty of caring for the poor brethren is one which we find emphasized again and again in both Testaments. In the Mosaic legislation we find the most minute enactments founded on this principle. There was the law about "gleaning." "When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger; I am the Lord thy God" (Lev. xix. 9, 10). This enactment was evidently intended to aid in the cultivation of a generous spirit on the part of those who "had" toward those who "had not." In effect it said, "Do not be close-fisted nor niggardly toward the poor, but be sympathetic and open-handed." And it said also, "If you act thus, God will recompense you."

Then there was the law of the "Sabbatic year," otherwise called the "Year of Release." Every seventh year the land was to remain untilled, and whatever it produced of itself, which in a land like Palestine would be a good deal, was to be for all in common. "Thou shalt let it rest and lie still, that the poor of thy people

may eat, and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard" (Ex. xxiii. 11). This year also all debts which had been contracted were to be cancelled (Deut. xv. 2).

There was also the law regarding "redemption." If a man, through stress of circumstances, had been compelled to sell his possession, either he or his kinsman might redeem it at any time, the price being reckoned according to the number of years till the year of Jubilee.

Then there was the law of the "Jubilee Year," which occurred every fiftieth year. This secured that the family property which, owing to adversity, had passed into other hands, was to be restored to its original owner.

In addition to all these there was the law of the "third year tithe." Every third year a tithe of the produce of the land was to be set apart for the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow (Deut. xxvi. 12).

With such enactments as these, we can easily see that, if they were honestly observed, there could be little, if any, chronic poverty in the land. There might be poverty of a temporary character, but a poor man had still the prospect, if industrious, of returning to the possession of his lost inheritance, and at any

rate it would come back to his family in the year of Jubilee. And it is all important for us as Christians to observe that alongside these requirements there is the constant repetition of the promise that the fulfilling of them will secure a special blessing. "The Lord thy God shall bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest."

The Jewish Church, then, was founded on the principle of brotherhood. And the principle on which the Christian Church is founded is the same. We have an illustration of this immediately after the Day of Pentecost. So overflowing was the brotherly love of the converts that they "had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as any man had need." They were not required to do this by any Divine Law. Their conduct was the spontaneous outcome of the overflowing love of their heart. And there are those who think that in acting as they did, they were not guided by the highest wisdom, and in confirmation of this, point to the fact that this Church at Jerusalem was the first to get into difficulties when famine visited the land. But, however that may have been, we have the fact that when adversity overtook them, the Christians in other countries came to their aid with offerings which the Apostle Paul declared were, in many cases, far beyond the natural ability of the givers. "To their

power, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves" (2 Cor. viii. 3).

The Church was not very old when we find the membership establishing a common fund for the support of their poor widows. It was for the management of this fund that the first deacons were ordained. And from what we find the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy it seems to have been the practice in the Apostolic Church when a poor widow reached the age of sixty years to enrol her as a permanent pensioner of the Church (1 Tim. v.).

The liberality of the early Church toward its poor, especially its aged poor, was one of its outstanding characteristics. In the time of Chrysostom, in the 4th century, the Church at Antioch supported, in whole or in part, no less than 3,000 poor people; and in the time of Cornelius, in the 3rd century, the Church at Rome supported 1,500 such persons. The heathen were wont to reproach the Christians by saying that they had no worship, as they had no altars. But the Christians replied that they had altars, that their poor brethren were their altars, and the gifts they bestowed on them were their offerings, which were well pleasing to their God. Little wonder, then, that the heathen exclaimed, "See how these Christians love one another." This sentiment of brotherhood and mutual helpfulness, which so strongly pervaded its

membership, was unquestionably one of the secrets of the wonderful progress made by the early Church. And if the same brotherliness and care for its poor members existed, in equal force in the Church to-day, it would occupy a more influential position in the world than it does.

Nor is it wonderful that this feeling of brotherhood should have so prevailed in the early Church. It was but carrying to greater perfection the tradition of the pre-Christian Church, in which most of the first members had been trained. Yea, it was in harmony with the teaching of the Founder of Christianity Himself. "This is my commandment," said Jesus, "that ye love one another" (John xv. 12). "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John xiii. 35). And by love He did not simply mean a sentiment of the mind, but the feeling of the mind embodied in a helpful deed of the hand. "When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, because they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just" (Luke xiv. 13). And by acting in this manner, Jesus has taught His followers, they will be employing their wealth in the way which will be most profitable to themselves in the end. "Make to yourselves friends," He says, "by means of the mammon of

unrighteousness ; that when it shall fail (*i.e.*, when your money shall fail you, and be of no further use to you ; in other words, when you shall die) they (*i.e.*, those whom you have made your friends by means of your generous gifts) may receive you into everlasting habitations " (Luke xvi. 9). In other words our Lord says to Christians who are blessed with means, " Use your money in helping the poor and needy, that when you go to heaven you may have friends there to welcome you, and to express to you their gratitude for your kindness to them on earth."

We ought not to forget that, toward the close of His earthly ministry, and just before His Crucifixion, He gave assurance that the final award of the Great Day would be according to the manner in which this law of brotherhood had been practised. On that day He will say, " Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world : for I was an hungered, and ye gave Me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took Me in : naked, and ye clothed Me : I was sick, and ye visited Me : I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. . . . Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these My brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me." It is surely an impressive thought that when we perform a deed of kindness to a poor Christian, Jesus takes it as done to Himself.

And we have His assurance that every such deed will at last have its reward at His hands. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matt. x. 42).

We have no objection to the State making laws for the relief of poverty; but its doing so will never release the Church from the responsibility of caring for its own poor members. They are Christ's own legacy to us; His representatives in receiving our gifts; the altar on which we are privileged to lay our offerings. It is no part of Christianity for the Church to hand over its poor people to the cold charity of the world, whether that charity be dispensed through the State's Poorhouse, or through any other outside institution. The Church cannot afford to do this. There is a blessing both temporal and spiritual to be had by sympathetic ministration to our own poor but faithful members. We are hard enough, and selfish enough, and mechanical enough as it is, without forfeiting one of our principal means of cultivating the spirit of generosity.

The duty of caring for our poor brethren is enforced by various considerations. It is enforced by the fact that God has commanded it; by the fact that Christ has exemplified it, nearly all His miracles being performed for the relief of the suffering and the needy; by the

fact that Christ regards what is done for one of the least of His brethren as done for Himself; and by the fact that the practice of it is a dictate of renewed human nature, for "Whoso hath this world's goods and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him?"

With such considerations as these before us, is it not a matter of surprise and reproach that the Church in its organized capacity has not, in our time, made more generous provision for its poor brethren; and that it has left such relief as is given, so largely to outside organizations? Why should not the orphan, the aged, and the disabled be the special care of that organization stablished by Christ Himself? One of the great weaknesses of the Church to-day is that it leaves so much of its philanthropic work to associations, many of which refuse to be in any way identified with religion, and this even when most of the money for the support of such associations is contributed by members of the Church.

It is a matter of satisfaction to many of us that the Presbyterian Church in Ireland has in late years been led to give a prominent place to work of this kind. For almost fifty years it has had an Orphan Fund to which all its congregations contribute according to their means, and out of which provision is made for all

orphan and fatherless children left without sufficient support. And within the last few years an Old Age Fund has also been established with gratifying success. It is a Fund to which all congregations of the Church are asked to contribute according to their ability, and out of which persons who, having reached at least sixty years of age, and having proved themselves worthy members of the Church, and being without adequate means of support, are helped according to their circumstances; persons also, who, though younger in years, have been disabled from earning, are also included among its beneficiaries. In the organization of this Fund regard has been had to the rules laid down by the Apostle Paul in the fifth chapter of his First Epistle to Timothy.

It will be admitted by all that there are two classes which have a special claim upon the sympathy and assistance of the Christian Church—fatherless children unprovided for, and aged men and women who, through no fault of their own, are unable to provide for themselves. The Orphan Fund meets the wants of the first class, and the Old Age Fund those of the second.

It is a matter of great gratification that these are objects, the claims of which, when presented to the members of the Church in a sympathetic spirit, always meet with a most generous response, not only on the

part of the rich, but also of those of more limited means.

> Blessed is he that wisely doth
> The poor man's case consider;
> For when the time of trouble is,
> The Lord will him deliver.

XI

THE COMPENSATIONS OF POVERTY

" Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him ? " (James ii. 5).

" Hearken, my beloved brethren ; did not God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He promised to them that love Him ? " (James ii. 5, R.V.).

THE COMPENSATIONS OF POVERTY

JAMES II. 5

IN this passage of Holy Scripture we have an example of what may be called the law of compensation ; a law of very wide application, which may solve many of the enigmas of this life.

Many have what is called a hard lot in life. And it is often difficult for us to see why it should be so. They have to battle with hardships all their days ; while there are others who live all their days in ease and, it may be, luxury. It is not easy to see the fairness of this, especially when we know that what are called the good things of this life do not always belong to those possessed of the noblest character.

Not only so. Some are born to high position and all that abounding wealth can procure, and others are born to obscurity and penury. One comes into life a child of fortune, and another of want. We ask why it should be so. And we can see that there is a great temptation to the poor to cherish hard thoughts of God, for thus, without apparent cause, assigning them such unfavourable circumstances.

Now, I do not mean to say that we can solve all the difficulties surrounding this subject. But surely the law of compensation may throw much light on it. If some are called to battle with difficulties, it is to be remembered these are the very circumstances which aid in the cultivation and display of some of the noblest qualities ; and by which many of the greatest temptations and dangers of life are avoided or overcome. Besides, it is manifest that the possession of wealth does not always bring happiness, nor make life the most desirable. On the contrary, there is a " making rich and adding sorrow with it."

When we look beyond the present life, and think of the world to come ; and when we consider that the life to come will be largely the outcome of the present life, we still more distinctly see how important is this law of compensation. The circumstances which are most unfavourable for this world may be the most favourable for that to come. This must have been the thought in the Apostle's mind when he said, " Our light affliction which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory ; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal " (2 Cor. iv. 17).

A short time ago I happened to get into conversation

with a young lad apparently about eighteen years of age, an entire stranger to me. He was dressed in the working clothes of a labourer. And as it was the Sabbath evening, I asked him if he had been to Church during the day. His reply was peculiar, but I doubt not expressed his real sentiment. He said, "No, the day was too fine for that!" And yet his manner was not rude; quite the opposite. His countenance bore a rather sad expression, and I ventured to ask him if he thought he had found the way of salvation. He replied, "O no, I am far from that. Salvation is not for the like of me, that is only for the rich." I told him that he was greatly mistaken; that poverty was rather a help than a hindrance to a person seeking salvation; that Jesus loved the poor as much as the rich; that Jesus Himself, when on earth, was a poor man Who worked as a carpenter. I further said, "God loves you, and desires your salvation." "But," he replied, with what I thought was a tone of bitterness, "He has given me poverty." "Yes," I said, "but while you may be among the poorest here, you might be among the richest hereafter. The rich man, of whom Jesus spoke in the parable, and who was clothed in purple and fared sumptuously every day, when he died lifted up his eyes in Hades, 'being in torments,' whereas the poor man who lay at the rich man's gate covered with sores and desiring to be fed

with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table, when he died was carried by angels to a place in Heaven beside the great patriarch Abraham." This young man, he told me, had been brought up in a Sabbath School, and while residing with his parents in the country, said his prayers and attended Church, but since he had come to seek employment in the city, had gradually left off prayer and attendance in the House of God, and for three years he had not prayed at all.

Now, it may be that thoughts similar to those of this young man may come into the minds of other young men. Much in our time seems to indicate that it is likely to be so. And hence it is I have selected this text for our consideration on this occasion. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?"

(1) THE POOR ARE GOD'S CHOSEN ONES. What does this mean? Does it mean that in an arbitrary manner He selects them to be His favourites? I do not think so. I believe it means that He has arranged in His providence that certain courses in life naturally tend to certain ends. When it is said that God hath chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the Kingdom, the meaning is that in the nature of things poverty makes it easier for a man to receive the Gospel and to enter into the life of faith. Jesus so taught

when He said, "It is hard for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God" (Matt. xix. 23).

The heavenly life is a life of faith. The Apostle says, "We walk by faith, not by sight." He contrasts these two modes of walking, and regards them as antagonistic. Sight has to do with the things of this world, material things, worldly possessions. But faith has to do with what we cannot as yet see, things mostly future, things of the world to come. Now, it stands to reason that if a man possess little of this world's good things on which to fix his thought and affection, the energies of his mind will be the freer to concentrate themselves on things above; it will, in other words, be easier for him to walk by faith.

I do not mean that a man cannot possess the things of this world without setting his supreme affection on them. Were it so, none of the rich could be saved. But I mean that in the case of the rich there is a greater obstacle to be overcome. The Countess of Huntingdon said she owed her salvation to the letter "m"; the language of Scripture being, "not *many* noble are called," instead of "not *any* noble." And as a matter of fact the majority of Christ's true disciples have been poor.

(2) THE SO-CALLED POOR MAY BE RICH EVEN HERE.

They may be rich in all that constitutes real worth and real enjoyment. God has chosen them, our text tells us, to be rich in faith. And faith is in itself a great possession, and a noble quality of the soul. It is to be observed that it is not merely faith but "rich" faith to which they are chosen. There is faith and "great" faith. And the teaching of the Apostle is that poverty contributes towards the possession of a great faith. But faith is like ready money, valuable not so much for what it is, as for what it can procure. Great faith procures great things here as well as hereafter. The man who has great faith in God and in His promises comes into possession of great power with God, great peace of mind, great contentment, great joy of heart, great hope for the future. And these are the things which make life worth living. The man of great faith gets into such intimacy with God that he can get anything from Him which is really for His good. "Whosoever shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that these things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith" (Mark xi. 23). No matter how poor he may be in worldly possessions, and no matter how uninfluential among men, he is a man of power. He has power with God and shall prevail. As nothing is impossible to God, so nothing is impossible to him that believeth in God.

(3) THE POOR MAY BE GREAT HEIRS. "God hath

chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, and heirs." In estimating what a man is worth you must take into account, not only what he has in hand, but that to which he is heir. He may have no ready money, but he may be heir to untold wealth; and in that case you do not think of him as poor. And so it is with the Christian. However poor he may be in the things of this world, he is born to "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven" (1 Peter i. 4). To the poorest who are rich in faith, Jesus will at last say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. xxv. 34).

(4) But we must not overlook the fact that to enjoy the blessings of which we have been speaking A MAN MUST LOVE GOD, WHETHER HE BE RICH OR POOR. The Kingdom is "promised to them that love Him." For a man to love God he must have a true conception of Him. He must not think of Him as the one described in the parable of the talents, who said, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter, and I was afraid" (Matt. xxv. 24). He must see that God is good unto all men, even to the poor; that poverty has its uses, and these for the benefit of His creatures, if only they will regard them

aright, and take out of them the good He has stored in them.

It is a great thing to have such a view of God and His providential dealings with us that we can say with the Apostle Paul, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content."

XII

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

" Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life " (Rev. ii. 10).

" Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life " (Rev. ii. 10, R.V.).

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

REV. II. 10

OUR subject is faithfulness. Faithfulness is closely related to faith. Faith is the root and faithfulness the fruit of the tree. By faith we become children of God, and faithfulness is one of their distinguishing characteristics.

It is in harmony with this that we find the words of our text addressed to Christians. They are spoken to "the Churches." "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches" (verse 11). The persons addressed are described as spiritually "rich" (verse 9). And it is to such spiritually minded and earnest believers the Holy Spirit says, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life."

Faithfulness is frequently set forth in Scripture as one of the distinguishing marks of true believers. The Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesian Christians as "the faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. i. 1): and to the Colossians as "the Saints and faithful brethren in

Christ" (Col. i. 2). According to the reading of the Revised Version faithfulness has a place among those graces which constitute the fruit of the Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, *faithfulness*, meekness, temperance" (Gal. v. 22).

Faithfulness is a relative term. It has reference to the particular circumstances in which the individual Christian may be placed, and to the special duties which spring out of those circumstances. No matter in what circumstances the Christian may be placed, faithfulness will be demanded of him, but the manifestation of it will depend to a large extent on the nature of his surroundings. By a reference to the context we learn what were the peculiar circumstances of the Christians of Smyrna, to whom the words of our text were first addressed. From verse 9 we find that they were in "tribulation"; that they were in "poverty" in consequence of the spoiling of their goods by the enemies of Christianity; and that they were the objects of "blasphemy" on the part of a synagogue of Satan, which means that they were calumniated and slandered by their fellow-citizens. And from verse 10 we find that they were anticipating worse than all this; that some of them were to be cast into prison, and that in all probability the end in some cases would be death. It was in these circumstances

they were urged to be faithful. We can thus easily see what was specially meant by faithfulness in their case. It meant that they were to stand firm in their Christian profession, bear their Christian testimony, and discharge their Christian duties though they should have to endure tribulation for so doing; though they should have to suffer pecuniary loss; though they should be slandered; though they should be imprisoned; yea, though they should forfeit their life. Jesus says to them, "Be thou faithful unto enduring tribulation; unto suffering the loss of thine earthly all; unto calumny; unto imprisonment; yea, unto death itself."

This was faithfulness at Smyrna in Apostolic times. It was faithfulness in the midst of trials, difficulties, and hardships. And I think we shall find that faithfulness has always associated with it the idea of difficulty and hardship. It means doing the right and the good, notwithstanding obstacles in the way; notwithstanding difficulties, dangers, opposition, and adverse influences. It is doing that which will benefit mankind, and glorify God, though the world, the flesh, and the devil, all oppose.

Now, the practical question for those of us who profess to be Christians is, What does faithfulness demand of us in our circumstances? Faithfulness is a standing grace in every age of the Church; and we

must not pretend to be Christians if we are not prepared to manifest it.

Faithfulness as a Christian grace means in every case, and therefore in ours, *Loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.* If we are Christians, "one is our Master, even Christ," and faithfulness must mean loyal obedience to Him. He is our Redeemer, and faithfulness must mean the devotion of the heart, and the consecration of every energy of our being to Him who has bought us with His precious blood.

A reference to verse 8 shows who is the Speaker in our text. "These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and lived again." It is He who died on the cross, and now lives in heaven, who says to the members of His Church on earth, "Be ye faithful unto death and I will give you the crown of life." And what He means is, "Be faithful to Me—to Me from whom you expect the crown of life. I have given my life for you; I have shed my blood for you; I have been faithful to you: be ye faithful to Me." It is thus our risen Lord addresses us.

He spoke these words after His ascension, after His humiliation and agony. More than sixty years after His return to heaven He showed Himself in a glorious vision to His servant John, in the isle that is called Patmos, and through Him sent to all branches of His Church on earth the command, "Be faithful to

Me." Let each of us, then, endeavour to realize that from the excellent glory, where He is robed in light and throned in might, He speaks to us and says, "Be faithful to Me."

All Christian living, all faithful serving, springs from personal attachment to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Christ is not a doctrine, but a person. And Christianity is not attachment to Christian doctrine, but to Christ Himself. When the Church has learned this truth more fully she will become more faithful.

Let us regard what has now been said as fundamental, and advance a step further in the unfolding, in a practical way, of our subject. Loyalty to the Personal Saviour is the essence of faithfulness. But faithfulness to Him will manifest itself. How will it do so?

(1) It will do it *by faithfulness to His Church.* The Church is composed of the professed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an organized community to which He has promised His presence, and in which by His Holy Spirit He dwells. As such organized community the members meet together for mutual fellowship, united worship, and the observance of the ordinances which He, as the King and Head, has ordained. The ultimate aim in all this is the edification and growth in grace of the members; and specially, the holding forth of the Word of Life to the world.

As the body of Christ, the Church is His manifestation to the world. This is the true and Scriptural idea of the Church; hence it is "the pillar and ground (or stay) of the truth."

Now, this is Christ's Church. It is not Knox's, nor Wesley's, nor Luther's, nor Paul's, nor Peter's. It is Christ's and precious in His sight.

If, therefore, we would be faithful to Christ we must be faithful to His Church. We must be faithful members of it. Our aim must be that it shall not, in any of its branches, become cold, or formal, or disorganized. Our prayers and efforts must be that it may be a living, loving association in whose membership a cold Christian will be warmed, and a worldly Christian spiritualized. Its prosperity must be our glory and joy: and he who would injure it must be regarded as touching the apple of our eye. We must be prepared to sacrifice personal feelings, and individual preferences for its general good. We must be ready to devote time, talents and means for its spiritual upbuilding and extension. We must love the assembly of its members not for our own sakes merely, but for the honour of Him who is worshipped and for the good of our fellow-members.

Faithfulness to the Church implies faithfulness to its individual members, sympathizing with them, encouraging them, and when necessary defending them.

The Church is intended to be a great household, the members knowing, loving, and helping one another. But to-day many Christian congregations are more like "hotels" than "households." A person goes to a hotel, orders for himself bed and board, cares for nobody else, and nobody else cares for him. Many of our Churches are great spiritual boarding-houses, where I do not know you, and you do not know me. There is no Christian brotherhood. The "Communion of Saints" is a term which has almost become obsolete. Many Christians do not know what it means. A minister once preached on the "Recognition of Friends in Heaven," and one of his hearers meeting him soon after, suggested that next time he should preach on the recognition of friends on earth!

(2) Then, faithfulness to Christ will manifest itself *in faithfulness to the perishing:* to those outside the Church. By these I mean all the unconverted, whether they occupy pews, or remain in their own homes, or frequent the haunts of vice. Faithfulness to Christ must mean faithfulness to all in whom He is interested. And who will say He has no interest in these careless, godless, ignorant ones, outside the Church and all the means of grace? Did not the Son of Man come to seek and save the lost? We ought to take firm hold of the great truth, *that God in some sense suspends the salvation of unsaved sinners on the exertion of those*

already saved. It is God's rule to save men by the agency of their fellow-men. The Church has not taken hold of this as it ought. You and I have not. If we had, more would be saved. The young would be brought to Jesus, not simply taught to read and repeat; careless men and women would be shaken out of the sleep of death.

(3) Again, faithfulness to Christ will manifest itself *in faithfulness to the family.* On this I need not dwell, for a Christian who is faithful to the Church and to the perishing cannot be indifferent to the members of his own household. And if he be really faithful to his household there will be few, if any, unconverted members in it—unconverted children afford a strong presumption that their parents are careless and prayerless. I do not mean to say that they may not be Christians, but it is greatly to be feared they have not been faithful.

(4) Faithfulness to Christ will manifest itself *in faithfulness to business engagements and responsibilities.* The grace of God teaches a man to live righteously in this present world. And so faithfulness to Christ means that the young man will deal faithfully with his employer's property; that the merchant will act faithfully toward his customers; that the servant will faithfully serve his master; and that the master will faithfully reward his servant. Faithfulness to Christ,

in a word, means that Christians will so act, in all the various relationships of life, as not to cause the religion of Christ to be evil spoken of by the world.

(5) Lastly, faithfulness to Christ will manifest itself *in faithfulness to one's self.* The man who is faithful to Christ, to the Church, to the perishing, to his family, and to his business responsibilities, will necessarily be faithful to himself. If he should lose all else he will have the crown of life; and he who gains this gains all that is most worth having.

To act in the manner now indicated may demand, even in our time, some sacrifice of worldly ease, and even so-called worldly success. But what of that, if it be for Christ and the cause that is dear to Him! He is worthy for whom this should be done. Yes, and if we have imbibed the spirit of Him who gave His life as a ransom for us, we shall not think the price too great to pay for the salvation of our fellow-men. There have been those who have been willing to do more than all this for the eternal good of men in danger of perishing.

Thomas Carlyle has told us of two men, an older and a younger, working in a mine in the neighbourhood of Liskeard. They were blasting in a level; and not till the fuse was lit for effecting their purpose, did they

discover that the "basket," which was let down to carry them out of danger, was only large enough for one. The elder man, a Christian worker, insisted on his younger companion mounting without him, because, as he said, he himself had assurance of Salvation, while his comrade might risk his soul as well as his body. He crouched down in a corner, and the explosion passed safely over his head. That man in intention gave his life for the salvation of his friend, and manifested the very spirit of Jesus Christ.

Death will come and finish our work here below, but let us be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord. Steady and steadfast to the end! Let this be our motto.

In the great storm of 1851 the lighthouse on Minot's Ledge, near Boston, was destroyed. It was a terrible night. Two men remained at their post in the lighthouse. A great multitude of people gathered on the shore anxiously waiting for the feared catastrophe. But ever and anon the bell tolled and the light flashed its signal to warn the sailor of his danger. At last one huge wave mightier than the rest rose up and throwing its arms round the tower laid it low in the sea. But as it fell the bell was heard to sound and the light was seen to flash. So should it be with the Christian, holding forth the Word of Life to the end, warning men to flee

from the wrath to come and to lay hold upon eternal life. And then, there will be the "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

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